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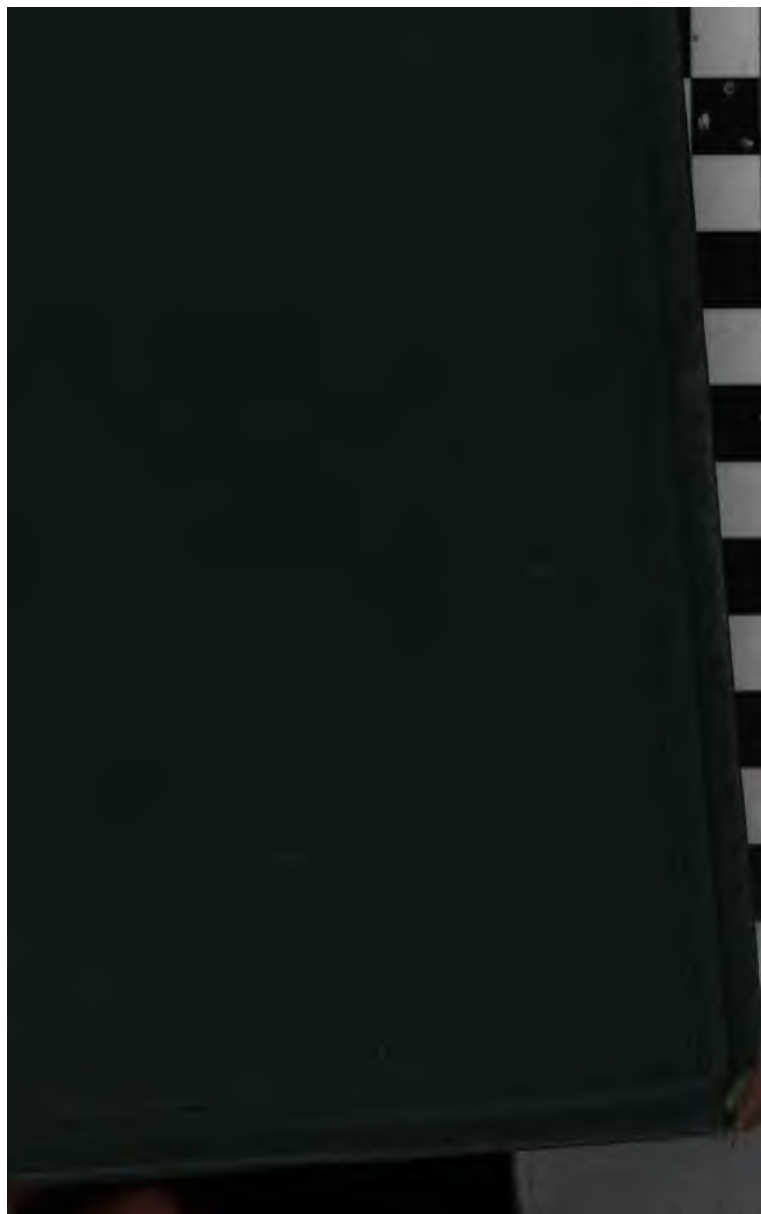
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THE SEWING GIRLS.

ROSS.

THE

WING-GIRL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE CHICAGO NEWSBOY."



CHICAGO,

WINSON BROTHERS,

1866.



FIG. 50. NO. 100.

MABEL ROSS,

THE

SEWING-GIRL.

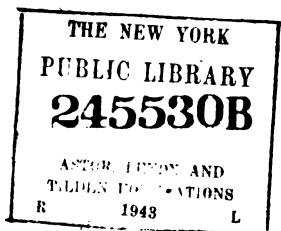
BY THE AUTHOR OF

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CHICAGO.
TOMLINSON BROTHERS.
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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. Cousin Algin, ...	7
II. The Sewing-Machine, ...	21
III. Hilda, ...	27
IV. Bertha Giles, ...	39
V. Hilda and her Mystery, ...	54
VI. Hilda a Sewing-Girl, ...	64
VII. Little Lilly, ...	74
VIII. A Search for Work, ...	85
IX. Mabel's New Employer, ...	95
X. Minnie, ...	108
XI. Unwelcome News, ...	115
XII. The Bad Heart, ...	121
XIII. The Old Boots, ...	129
XIV. The House-Agent, ...	138
XV. The Mountain Ash, ...	143
XVI. Died at Her Post, ...	150
XVII. The "Strike,"	163
XVIII. Good Angels, ...	176
XIX. Cold November, ...	188
XX. The Sail-Loft, ...	196
XXI. Heart Scalds, ...	207
XXII. The Last Dollar, ...	215
XXIII. The Pawnbroker, ...	224

Wormsley July 1943

XXIV. Domestic Accounts, ...	234
XXV. How Hilda kept her Powder Dry, ...	242
XXVI. A Legal Friend, ...	257
XXVII. The First-floor Lodger, ...	266
XXVIII. The Visitor of the First-floor Lodger, ...	279
XXIX. "Work — work — work,"	288
XXX. Aristocracy, ...	304
XXXI. "Will you walk into my Parlor?"	318
XXXII. Another Visitor, ...	324
XXXIII. The Rag-Merchants, ...	337
XXXIV. The Lady-President, ...	349
XXXV. Mr. Pinch and Company, ...	364
XXXVI. The Aid Society, ...	375
XXXVII. The Wolf at the Door, ...	388
XXXVIII. Barbara Strand, ...	402
XXXIX. Law and Justice, ...	415
XL. Tares Sown, Tares Reaped, ...	423
XLI. Under the Mountain-Ash, ...	439

INTRODUCTION.

BEFORE the reader turns to the first page of this history, let a clear understanding be arrived at between him and the writer.

In penning the story of "The Sewing-girl," the author's purpose was not to get up a thrilling tale, but to present simple truths in a way thought likely to gain for them attention.

Let no reader, then, believe there is here shown one picture which can justly be styled "highly colored;" on the contrary, many facts which have come to the knowledge of the writer, in connection with a sewing-girl's experiences,—and which might be gathered by any who took the trouble to look for them,—have been denied a place in this volume, through fear of their appearing, to the ordinary observer, improbable.

It is so difficult to believe these *every-day* tales of

wrong and oppression, so almost impossible to realize that, in our very midst, under the eye of an enlightened and sympathizing community, there are systematized persecutions of the struggling needy and the unprotected! Yet these things are.

The path of the self-dependent woman is thorny at best; that of the sewing-woman, in a very large majority of cases, most particularly so; but with inadequate pay for her labor spring up a long train of attending woes and difficulties, which render it the next thing to unendurable. Indeed, to those who look on, apart from the atmosphere of *necessity* which envelopes the actress in the homely life-drama, — too often a tragedy, — the wonder is, that human hearts and human frames can bear so much, and bear that much so long.

MABEL ROSS:

THE SEWING-GIRL.

CHAPTER I.

COUSIN ALGIN.



HAVE been talking with the doctor, Mabel."

Mabel had just entered the room,—the still, dark sick-room, when met at the door with these whispered words. She made no reply, only turned on the speaker her sad, anxious eyes, while her pale face grew yet paler.

"You understand, Mabel? You know my way,—that I think it so much better to know the worst at once."

"*The worst*, cousin Algin?"

"The worst, my poor girl."

Mabel, almost fainting, let her head fall upon

the shoulder of her cousin, who silently put her arms about her. Gently, she drew her from the room, and led her to a settee in the hall, where, seating herself, she drew the young girl down beside her.

"It is well, Mabel, that we should know it," she whispered, — "well that while she has yet strength to make such arrangements as are needful, the effort should be made. It is better for her, — better for all."

Tears had now come to the partial relief of Mabel, and her sobs were the sole reply to this remark.

"I have told your mother, my dear. She knows that, unless a miracle be worked in her favor, eight and forty hours are the longest time" —

"Cousin Algin, I must go to her!" and Mabel made an effort to throw off the arms entwined about her.

"Not so, my dear;" and the arms enclosed her more closely. "Your mother is just now under effect of some drops given her by the doctor; and it is better so. She will be refreshed and strengthened by the rest for the duty before her, while you

will have time to compose yourself, as she wishes. She told me to speak to you, — to prepare you.”

“Prepare me?” sobbed poor Mabel. “O cousin Algin, there is no preparing for a thing like this!”

“Not to bear it stoically, my dear, — you are too young, too affectionate for that, — but to reconcile yourself, in a measure, to this worst, which there is no avoiding, and to hear, with something like composure, the last words of your mother. My dear cousin talked with me before she slept. She said she was neither startled nor alarmed at the communication I made her; that, though she would not say so to us, she had long felt there was nothing to do but to prepare for this parting. It seems, indeed, that she has, quietly to herself, already arranged everything as seems to her best, under the circumstances; and it only remains for us to promise faithful compliance with her wishes. Of course, as far as you are concerned, Mabel, there will be perfect willingness.”

“Can you doubt it, cousin? Dear, dear mother! I must go sit beside her. I have not been in the room, you know, since the doctor’s coming, when you told me to take Lilly away.”

"You will be perfectly quiet, Mabel? You will not attempt to speak to her?"

"Oh, no! I only want to be near her, when, in so little while" —

"You may go, my dear. Lilly, I suppose is asleep?"

"Yes, cousin. Poor little thing! she wouldn't have disturbed mother, she's been so quiet."

Released from the detaining arms of Mrs. Kingsley, Mabel made her way to her mother's bedside, to smother her grief in quiet, and to gaze through blinding tears upon the loved features soon to be still in death. She sat there alone, none in the chamber but the dying woman and herself, Mrs. Kingsley having retired so soon as the brief conversation in the hall was ended.

Mabel Ross was but eighteen, and, six months before, might have been regarded as the child, in feelings and ways, which she was at ten. But the woman, the patient and self-sacrificing woman, had been developing within her during these six months. The sudden death of a loved father, less than a year before, had left her and her mother and sisters in what appeared to be the easy circumstances they had long enjoyed; but, through

failure of a business friend, for whom Mr. Ross had endorsed to a large amount, they were, a few months later, stripped of nearly all their means. The few hundred dollars saved from this wreck of fortune were nearly consumed during the six months' illness of Mrs. Ross, whose condition was such as left her children no thought but for her.

Something like fifteen minutes after Mabel commenced her weeping watch beside her mother, Mrs. Kingsley reëntered the room.

"It is time for the girls to come in from school," she whispered to Mabel; "and I would like you to see them below and tell them what I have told you."

Mabel cast a wistful look at the pale face on the pillow, which said how regretfully she would leave her mother just then.

"Mightn't they come to you here, cousin?" she asked. "You can take them from the room, as you did me."

"Yes, my dear, if it was only Minnie; but Hilda's such a thoughtless girl, she'll be sure to make an outbreak. It's best for you to await their coming in the sitting-room, while I take your place here."

Mabel seemed on the point of putting in another plea to remain ; then rising, she bent a look of grief on the sleeping form of her mother, and left the room. Her heart craved to stay ; but "cousin Algin" had directed her to go below, and cousin Algin had had all things her own way in the house from the hour the now dying woman was taken ill.

Mrs. Kingsley followed the young girl to the door to whisper one more direction, which was that she should remain below with her sisters until summoned by the bell to the sick-room.

A few minutes later, the expected girls entered the house, and having drawn them into the sitting-room, Mabel, with all the composure she could summon, made to them the sad communication recently made to herself.

It was received by each in a way characteristic of the girl, — by Hilda, with a passionate burst of weeping ; by Minnie, with a paling of the cheeks and lips and a look of anguish which could find no immediate relief in tears. Both the girls were Mabel's juniors, Hilda being fourteen, and Minnie eleven. Putting an arm about each, and clasped in their returning embrace, Mabel sought to bring them

to that composure, she was herself struggling to attain.

"I'm going this moment to dear mother," presently cried Hilda, starting up from the sofa where Mabel had drawn them beside her. "What are we doing here, Mabel, when, in a little time, she'll be — she'll be gone from us?" And she burst into another spell of noisy weeping.

"Dear Hilda, only stay till you can be more quiet. Mother is sleeping. She needs to sleep all she can, just now."

"I'll be quiet as can be," rejoined Hilda, almost choking in her efforts to check her sobs; "only I'm going to see mother this minute. Cousin Algin's been keeping us too much away. It's a shame, and I always thought so."

"She has meant it for the best," said Mabel. "Dear mother has been so nervous and feeble, so easily disturbed."

"She's a busybody, that wants to manage every one's affairs, — cousin Algin is!" said Hilda, with some temper. "She's put you aside, Mabel, when you begged to be let do things, and when mother'd rather have had you, too."

"It was a hard thing for me," Mabel replied,

through her tears; "but then, cousin Algin knew best; and besides, I had to see to Lilly."

"But when *will* cousin Algin let us go to mother, Mabel?" asked the pale, timid Minnie, putting her trembling hand in her sister's.

"Yes, I'd like to know that!" cried Hilda, her indignation, for the moment, getting the better of her distress. "When will she consent to three poor girls seeing their — their" —

This time the indignation gave way, and the weeping reasserted itself.

Before Mabel could reply, the bell from the sick-chamber sounded. The three girls in silence left the room together; Hilda hurrying in advance, and her sisters following, hand in hand.

And thus they entered the chamber, the impetuous Hilda rushing to her mother's bedside, where she threw herself, weeping, on her knees beside the pillow, and Mabel and Minnie, pressing up quietly to the bed, suppressing their sorrow, in thought of the suffering woman.

Mrs. Ross was now awake. She reclined, with her head somewhat raised, while Mrs. Kingsley sat beside the bed, her arm about little Lilly. Lilly was not yet three years old, and could not be

expected fully to comprehend the scene before her ; but she knew her mother was very sick, and that cousin Algin had directed herself to be very quiet and still ; and she did her best to obey her. The sight of Hilda's abandonment of grief was, however, too much for her, and she presently began to cry quite loudly, requiring some trouble on the part of the cousin to pacify her.

"Do not grieve, my dear children," said Mrs. Ross, soon as something like quiet was restored. "God calls me from you, but our parting is but for a time. Stand by the love to Him I have taught you, and we will one day meet where parting is no more." She extended a shadowy hand to Mabel, and laid the other on the head of Hilda, whose face was now buried in the bedclothes.

"I may not have strength after this morning to say what I would wish to you, my children," she continued, after a pause. "Mabel, my darling ?"

"Yes, dearest mother ;" and Mabel bent close over the pillows, restraining her rising sobs as she best could.

"I leave you, Mabel, head of my little family, — the older sister of Hilda and Minnie, who I trust will always look up to you, — the *mother* of

my little Lilly. My poor baby is too young to be left to any other than a sister's care; I give her to you, Mabel. You will make her worthy that home to which we all are speeding!"

"Dear mother, I will do my duty to her as God gives me strength," sobbed the suffering girl. "I will pray for strength to do it well."

"I know it, Mabel. You are my hope for all I leave behind. God be thanked for the blessing given me in you. A hard struggle is before you, my child; the path of the toiling woman is a weary one."

"Don't think of it, mother. I am young and strong, and will take the burden for all. We will be together; we will do well."

A silence of some minutes followed. Mrs. Ross was gathering strength to speak further.

"Hilda, my dear Hilda, will go to her cousin Algin," she then said.

Hilda raised her head with a startled look into her mother's face.

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried; "I'll stay with Mabel, dear mother, — always with Mabel."

Mrs. Ross glanced uneasily at her cousin, and feebly put out her hand to Hilda.

"Your mother has arranged all for the best, Hilda, my dear," said Mrs. Kingsley. "Don't disturb her with objections at an awful moment like this."

"O mother!" cried the young girl, "change your mind in this one thing,—oh, do! I can go with no one but Mabel; be happy with no one else."

The dying woman's hand was laid tenderly on that of the impetuous girl.

"My poor, poor Hilda!" she whispered. "God temper you to the lot before you!"

"Need Hilda leave us, mother?" Mabel ventured to say. "Why may we not all be together?"

"If I thought it for the best, my darlings," Mrs. Ross replied, with another glance at the cousin.

"Yes, girls, if your mother thought it for the best," echoed the latter; "but she has reflected on the matter, and sees it would not be. So it remains for you, like good, obedient children, to agree to her wishes,—your mother's *last* wishes, remember."

The words, "your mother's last wishes," caused

a sudden sob to choke down what Mabel was about to say; but she struggled with the agony, feeling that she *must* make an effort to keep her sister to her side in that sad time coming to them.

"Mother, dear mother, *leave us together*," she said; "let there be no more parting than God orders,—no more."

"How do you expect to live, Mabel Ross?" abruptly asked the cousin. "Something like two hundred dollars is all I believe which remains of your father's estate; what then, do you propose to do?"

"To work," was the ready response. "I'm not at all afraid to work, cousin,—not at all, dear mother."

"That you can do for yourself and Lilly, and help along Minnie, I believe," replied Mrs. Kingsley, in a different tone; "but when it comes to Hilda, it is a little too much."

"Not if Hilda does her share," said the young person in question; "and she can and will."

"She will," mildly returned her cousin; "but not by side of Mabel. If you love your sister, Hilda, you should wish for her own sake to leave her."

"She thinks I'll be a stone about your neck, Mabel," said Hilda, with a resentful glance at her cousin. "She'll make you think so, too! and you'll give me up."

"Not if dear mother will let me have you," was the reply. "I want you, my sister,—I want you all."

"Beulah," whispered Mrs. Ross; and her cousin bent over her. What the dying woman said did not reach the ears of the young people; neither did the reply made by the cousin.

"Your mother is wasting her strength in speaking," then said the latter to them; "and she wishes me to explain her arrangements to you. Hilda is to come to me; little Lilly is to stay with Mabel; and Minnie is to go to Mrs. Lemming, who was to see your mother yesterday, and sent a message to her through me to-day."

Before the words were finished, a wail came from the lips of the third sister,—a wail that went to the heart of the mother. Minnie had been resting on the arm of Mabel; she clung with all her strength to it now.

Mabel had faintly echoed the plaint; but see-

ing the look of distress on the face of her mother, she checked her feelings, and also whispered a word of caution to poor Minnie.

“Dear mother means all for the best,” she then said to her sisters, “and we will do as she wishes. Dearest mother, be easy about us ; it shall be as you say, and we will do well.”

The assurance came none too soon ; Mrs. Ross’s features were paling to the hue of death ; a look of death was settling upon her countenance. All saw the change ; and the three girls fixed their tear-dimmed eyes upon her in an agony that admitted no words. Little Lilly, too, made a cry, and threw herself forward on the pillow beside her mother, positively refusing to be drawn away by the arm of cousin Algin.

“God be with you, my poor, penniless girls !” faintly breathed the dying woman.

They were the last words she spoke. A state of exhaustion followed, from which there was no rally ; and toward the dawn of the next morning the mother breathed her last.

CHAPTER II.

THE SEWING-MACHINE.

LICK, click, click! It's pretty, Mabel! Lilly loves to hear it, and to see the wheels run round so fast, — *so fast!*" and little Lilly would clap her hands in delight as the bright new sewing-machine whirred its busy music; while, guided by Mabel's fingers, the snowy linen received its neat rows of fairy stitches.

The lively talk and pretty ways of her little sister were the recreation which enlivened Mabel's monotonous labors; she could almost, for a time, forget in them their sad orphanage and their poverty. But *was* it poverty? This was a question the young girl often asked herself, — often through the busy hours of the day, oftener still in the silent ones of the night. Was it poverty she was knowing now, when by her sewing-machine, — purchased with the last of the

money which came into her hands at the time of her mother's death, only reserving enough to pay one month's advance rent for the couple of neat rooms she occupied with her little sister, — she could make enough, nay more than enough, to meet their daily necessities? It is true that by night she was wearied, through her twelve hours' ceaseless labors; but her sleep rested her, and she was contented, — happy, but for her recent loss. And when, after prayer, she pillowed the curly head of her young sister on her breast, it was with no feeling of repining that God had taken the two loved ones to himself, but of thankfulness that he had still left them so much.

Six days of the seven were so passed. Then came a bright change: one sweet, soul-and-body-reviving day, delightful in anticipation, soothing in reality, contenting in retrospect, — the Sabbath, — the beautiful, God-given Sabbath, — the crowning light to that world which its glorious Maker had said was good. To Mabel it was very much more than a day of rest; it was one of revivifying enjoyment and of encouragement to well-doing. On that day, more than any other, seemed to come to her sweetly her moth-

er's words, "I leave you, Mabel, *the mother* of my little Lilly. Make her worthy that home to which we all are speeding."

Make her worthy that home! Oh, if she failed in this, she failed indeed in her earthly duties, — she was given life and strength in vain, — clearly saw her path marked out in vain! And that she should not fail, she kept her heart fixed on the sacred trust, and watched from day to day the passage of the infant feet entrusted to her care. She taught the child to love the Sabbath, and the bountiful Sabbath Giver. She made the day not one of restraint and weariness, but of cheerful, heart-lifting thankfulness and prayer. With the little girl she attended morning service in the church their mother had first taken them to, and there strove to fix the attention and understanding of her young companion; then, after their simple dinner, came a long walk, if weather permitted, to invigorate each after the home-staying of the week.

During these walks it was Mabel's custom to talk with the little girl on those sacred themes she wished to impress on the mind of the child, bringing her language, so nearly as she could, to the

comprehension of her companion. And that readiness, that *mysterious* readiness to comprehend divine truths so frequently seen in the very young, showed itself, to Mabel's delight, in her infant sister. Startling were the questions she would put, beautiful the ideas which, simply conceived, she as simply confided to her guide.

An endless theme between the orphan sisters was the departed mother, the "angel in heaven," as Mabel taught the child to conceive her, watching with unwearying interest the well-doing of her children on earth. The first agony of her grief exhausted, it became a sad pleasure to Mabel to yield to the more tranquil weeping which such conversations as these would cause ; and when the weather was such as confined them to the house, the pleasant talks would take place in the snug little room, which, in the limited economy of Mabel's house-keeping, answered every purpose but that of a sleeping apartment.

Lilly was not a robust child, and Mabel was careful to try her as little as possible.

With six o'clock the latter's week-day evening was over, and after the supper which followed, if other household duties or weather did not interfere,

she would stroll out for a time with little Lilly. Sometimes it was but a few moments so spent, sometimes half an hour; but, little or more, it all did its service in giving health and strength to the child and the young sewer.

These were the times when were made Mabel's and Lilly's occasional visits to their sisters, — occasional only, as both Mrs. Lemming and Mrs. Kingsley lived too far from Mabel's humble abode to permit the walk to be taken so frequently as she and the little Lilly would have wished. Whenever opportunity offered, however, Hilda and Minnie would come to their sister's home; and these were the most frequent seasons of reunion in the little family.

With regard to neither of the older of her sisters was Mabel's mind quite at ease, though her concern was principally aroused for Hilda. The violence of the latter's grief for her mother's loss with time subsided, but she gave no promise of content under her new circumstances. Her unequal temper showed itself in spells of alternate petulance and gloom, upon such occasions as she and Mabel met, but no spark of her old liveliness was yet to be seen. It is true that she confessed

candidly to her sister that she had no cause of complaint against her cousin since coming under her roof. She was exacting in work, to be sure, keeping her, for the chief hours of the day, busily employed with her needle; but Hilda knew this fell far short of the time Mabel herself labored, and had the grace to offer no complaint concerning it. She had good clothes and a comfortable home, yet asserted herself to be miserably unhappy. The *why* may be understood, if not explained, by a conversation between herself and Mabel some five months after the death of their mother.

Upon this occasion Hilda had come to visit her sister toward the close of the afternoon, and, as they busily talked, the "click, click," as little Lily called it, of the sewing-machine under Mabel's busy fingers, kept up a lively accompaniment, and one that prevented their words too distinctly reaching the ear of the child.

CHAPTER III.

HILDA.



IT'S something more than a roof over one's head, food to eat, and clothes on one's back, one needs to make life bearable, Mabel," said the visitor, shortly after her entrance. "One needs to feel they're something to those about them, — to the folks who give them these things; not to be looked upon as a stock or a stone."

"Cousin Algin and cousin Hugh don't look upon you that way, Hilda; I think they show real friendship and kindness."

"The less you say about their friendship, the better," petulantly rejoined Hilda. "I never believed in it, and never will."

"With real proofs of it, that is unkind, Hilda."

Hilda was silent for a while, then said, "I'm only seeing things as they really are, Mabel; and that's a thing I can't, for my life, help doing. I

never liked cousin Algin; and from the time poor dear mother was sick, and she came about us so much, I've liked her less than ever."

"Dear Hilda! just at the time she most deserved our love."

"She don't deserve a bit of it, Mabel; she's self, self, self, all over. So when I think of all she's done in past months, and how she's taken me, I see just as plainly as though she'd told me, — yes, and a good deal plainer, — it's because, in some way or other, it serves herself. Oh, don't look that way, Mabel! don't make your miserable, crushed-down sister Hilda more miserable and crushed-down by knowing she can't, even once in a while, tell the sister she loves with all her heart what fancies are in her brain, and what things she's getting at with the sharp *inside eyes* God has given her. I wish I didn't see so much," she added, in a yet more petulant tone, "but I can't help it — so *must*. God made me so, and surely he don't make mistakes. Maybe — just *maybe*, now, he means it for something."

Startled by the tone in which the strange words were spoken, Mabel looked up wonderingly to the changing features of her sister. Hilda had always

been a mystery to her own more simple nature, and was now yet more of one. Just at the time, too, when Mabel had the good of each sister so pressingly at heart, and it saddened her.

"You look as if I'd said something dreadful," resumed Hilda, "and maybe I have. Maybe I'm wicked, and maybe I'm going to be wickeder still; but I can't help it. I'm pushed to it, so some one else is to blame than me."

"Do not talk so, dear Hilda. We have so many blessings to be thankful for, that it seems to be particularly wrong for us to be repining, or ugly-tempered. It almost looks like" —

"Like a tempting of Providence, you mean," put in Hilda, as her sister paused. "Now don't — don't, for your life, Mabel, say what you were going to say that time!"

"You mistake, Hilda. What did you think I was going to say?"

"That if I talked in this ugly way, you'd not let me come to you. Mabel, if you say *that*, you drive me to desperation!"

Mabel's cheek paled as she took her sister's restless hand in her own.

"I had no thought of such words, my darling,"

she said. "Nothing could drive me from you, — nothing make me love you less. It is for your own good I speak of your unhappy way. It would be so much happier for you to see things in a cheerful light, as you used to."

Hilda abruptly covered her face and burst into tears. For something like half a minute, she so remained; then as suddenly checking her crying, she looked up to Mabel, who had twined her arms about her.

"You're a good sister as ever lived, Mabel," she said; "and if it had only been settled I could live with you, everything would have gone well. But *she* put dear mother up to parting us all; so you're here, and I'm a mile off. Well, Mabel, I can't live with people I don't love; so some day it'll come to my running away, — to *you*, if you'll have me, — to *myself*, if you turn your back on me."

"My darling Hilda, how you frighten me!"

"When it comes to the leaving, Mabel, which of the two shall it be?"

"I hope it won't come to it, Hilda. I can't think you mean all those strange things; but if you do leave, with or without cousin's consent, there's but one place for you, and that is your sister's home."

"Thank you, Mabel. I'll be with you before a great while, make sure."

"But I don't wish to encourage your discontent, Hilda. I say, all along, it is right we obey dear mother's last directions."

"If I could find cousin Algin's tolerable, Mabel. But when I see there's so much *seeming* in all her services to us, — that it's so evident she has some reason" —

"I don't care, Hilda, to look for other reason than the good one that appears, — the wish to serve four poor fatherless and motherless girls, who are nearly related to her."

"It's just like you, Mabel, to look on the outside, and see nothing under it. It always was your way, and, I suppose, always will be; and I think it strange, too, for you're as smart a girl as lives. But I'm different. It's *my* way to worry through things to what's under, — to poke through the upper crust, as it were, and see what's in the pie. There always *is* an upper crust, — a something that's put on to make a show of what *isn't*, while what really *is* lies covered safe below, — safe enough for the trouble most folks take to poke after it. It seems to me it's all the time covering

up, and covering up, and make believe, the whole world through."

"Dear Hilda, what nonsense you talk!"

"It seems so to you, Mabel, your way of thinking and talking is so different from mine. But God made me as I am, just as he made you as you are; so he means us for different sorts of work, — I mean, to bring about different things. You'll do your part well, — there's no doubt about that. You'll go on, good and steady, to the last, and bring up Lilly to be good and steady, like yourself; while for me, — well, I'll do my part, too. I'll worry and ferret out this *something*, and, by and by, it may be a service to us all."

"I'd rather, Hilda, have you use the good sense I know you have, and put from you those odd fancies. Neither have you this matter of how God has made us, and our particular responsibilities, quite right. We have all our faults and weak points. We are all, by nature, sinful in his eyes, who is, in himself, perfect; but then he has given us sure means by which our faults may be lessened, and it pleases him well to see us striving against them. Can there be a more miserable mistake than to believe, that, with assurance of all

this, we are simply to make an excuse for our short-comings, that God has made us with such or such failings? Do not think it, Hilda. We are to struggle bravely with temptation; and the better we come off in the battle, the surer He will love and bless us."

"It is easy for you to talk so, Mabel, when you're made with a nature all goodness. Where is the battling for *you* to do?"

"*Here*, in my heart, Hilda; now, at this moment, and always. The battle comes to us all, and none can fly it with honor to God."

Hilda looked at her sister in surprise.

"You've grown to be a real woman, Mabel," she said. "You're no more the girl you were last year, than if a dozen years had passed between. Mother knew you, when she left you Lilly. But then, what a mistake to leave you only Lilly! None of us should have been parted from you, Mabel. Our place was by your side, and it's the place we'll come to yet. Don't look frightened again. I'd not come to you to-day, if you'd ask me. I've something to do first where I am, and, after that, — who knows? And now about Minnie. Have you seen her this week?"

"Yes, last Monday. She wasn't very well when she stopped on Sunday morning, so I went to ask after her."

"I don't believe she *is* well. Poor Minnie! I'm not sure but she has a harder time than me."

"Mrs. Lemming is kind to her, Hilda. She makes no difference between her and her own niece. When Minnie gets a little more over her sorrow for poor mother, I expect to see her a happy girl."

"I don't a bit. Mrs. Lemming herself is well enough; but there is the niece, that's anything but pleased to have another girl come in to share the good things she's been getting to herself. She leads Minnie a miserable life, — she's a perfect tyrant, that Clara Dean!"

"Minnie doesn't say so, Hilda; she makes no complaint."

"No, because it's not her way; besides she's afraid. Then *you* see things only on the outside; so you know nothing. But I keep my eyes and ears about me; I poke through the upper-crust; so I know the whole story. That Clara's a sly, artful, snake-in-the-grass, and Mrs. Lemming is de-

ceived by her. I'm sure she'd never have such things if she knew."

"Such things as what?" anxiously inquired Mabel.

"Why, the way Clara puts on with Minnie, and calls her a 'charity child' of her aunt's. She knows Minnie won't tell, so she goes it strong. She makes the poor child ill at ease with the teachers, and with the servants, saying her aunt has undertaken to make 'one lady out of the Ross family,' but that she'll never succeed. Dear knows, our Minnie has more of a lady in her little finger than Clara Dean has in her whole body."

"How did you learn all this, Hilda?" Mabel very gravely asked.

"Through my inside-eyes and inside-ears," replied the strange girl. "I've worried it out, little by little, and now it's a plain story to me. It's jealousy on the part of Clara, because another girl is brought to the house to be made much of and almost get beyond her with the teachers. Minnie has done wonders with her French, and Clara can't stand it. If she was a mean, stupid girl, it would be another thing. If she was that sort of

girl, too, she'd stand Clara's ill-treating better than she does. As it is, it comes near breaking her heart."

"Oh, no, Hilda! Does she make complaint to you?"

"She does and she doesn't. She'd say nothing, if I let her alone; but that I can't do. So I find out everything my own way. I put things right home to her, and, though she fights shy, puts on a *crust*, you know (she's learning that, like the rest), she ends by crying, in her quiet way, and then I know just how the matter stands."

"Dear Minnie is so sensitive, so timid," said Mabel, "that these trials must be much to her. But there is one great good that she must gain, in spite of all her suffering, and that is a finished education which will enable her to make a living by teaching."

"You don't think, then, that Mrs. Lemming means to make a lady of her?"

"Mrs. Lemming, nor no one, can make anything else of Minnie. She is like our dear mother, gentle and lady-like, every bit of her. But it is not my notions of a lady to live in idleness or in dependence, when we can work for ourselves.

I don't know what are Mrs. Lemming's plans for Minnie; but I know that by giving her a good education, she confers a great kindness on her, and on us all; and I look to it making our sister dependent on her own efforts in years to come."

"If father hadn't endorsed for that Barrett, he'd have left us money to live on, Mabel; then none of us would have to work, or, what's worse, be beholden to strangers."

Mabel made no reply. She was adjusting a new needle to her sewing-machine.

"I think that Barrett was a rascal!" very warmly pursued Hilda. "Poor father's clerk, too, for years, that had already received so many favors from him! The loss of the money is made worse by thought of its having gone to pay another man's debts."

"It was all right in law and business, Hilda," replied Mabel, who was again busily working; "and you can't justly call Mr. Barrett a rascal. It was unlooked-for changes in business that caused all the trouble, and he couldn't help it any more than we could."

"But he could do something for us now we're left alone," said Hilda, still petulantly. "Everybody knows he's going on with business again."

"He is building it up again, Hilda ; that is what I've heard. Give him time ; he may yet do something for us."

"Don't you believe he'll ever give us a cent ! It seems to me money wont stay by us. Look at that old uncle of father's, Godfrey Farnum, that died ten years ago, and who, after making believe for an age that he meant to leave something to father, makes a will giwing his whole fortune to — who was it he gave it to, Mabel ?"

"To cousin Hugh, who was uncle Godfrey's nephew on one side of the family, as father was on the other."

"Oh, yes ; I had forgotten it was to cousin Hugh. Well, that's another proof, Mabel, as I was going to say, of our being the most unlucky of creatures ! If it had been any one else but poor, dear father, he'd have got something from uncle Godfrey ; but as it *was* him, why — he lost it."

Mabel made no remark. She knew Hilda's "way," as the latter called it, of running on, aggravating herself, and piling up an accumulation of trouble ; and knew, also, that it was needless to make effort to stem the torrent of her humor.

CHAPTER IV.

BERTHA GILES.



WITHIN a year after the death of her mother, a variation took place in Mabel's duties. This was from home-work for private customers to a place in the store of one of the principal agents for sewing-machines.

It was at Mrs. Lemming's suggestion the change was made, as the summer months (it was now July) were losing Mabel most of her customers. Through this lady's efforts only, the excellent place Mabel found herself in possession of was attained, — such positions being too much in demand for the young girl to have come into it by any exertions of her own.

In the large cloak-room of this store, Mabel had prospect of making, through the coming autumn and winter months, yet more than she had made on her home work ; while, even at the present un-

favorable season, it afforded her a living, which her customer work had latterly failed to do. Indeed, had she not previously laid by every dollar she could possibly spare, her position would have become a distressing one.

But opposed to these advantages of her new position was the being necessitated to leave little Lilly through the waking hours of the week-days. This was a trial to Mabel herself, and both a trial and inconvenience to the child. To the kindness of a couple of neighbors only, Mabel was at all enabled to get over the difficulty. These neighbors, — one of whom occupied a room in the house where Mabel lodged, and the other a portion of an adjacent one, — consenting to take the child, on alternate days, under charge.

Poor little Lilly missed her sister very much, and though, for so young a child, particularly patient and uncomplaining, she was, for a time, irreconcilable to the change. By and by, however, she found consolation in looking forward to the evening hour which was to reunite her and her loved Mabel, and, beyond this, to the one day out of seven, which was to see no parting between them.

For Mabel herself the change was a great one, in more respects than those already mentioned. It brought her in contact with other girls of her age and vocation, and companions of this sort were new to her. The reserve and quiet of her manner caused her, for a time, to feel lost among her new associates; but these were qualities approved by her employers, and she soon won their confidence through them.

Among the very few of the girls employed in Mabel's department who were rather drawn toward her than repulsed by the peculiarities of her demeanor, was one known as Bertha Giles. Of all the girls in the employ of Mr. —, Bertha was the one Mabel would have chosen to be well regarded by. There was a quiet, subdued manner about her, which both harmonized with her own feelings and interested her; and she was not sorry when she found Bertha, evening after evening, taking advantage of their homeward walk, lying, for some distance, in the same direction, to claim her as a companion.

One evening, as they thus walked together, Mabel remarked on the similarity of her own and her companion's position, so far as they were both

doubly orphaned and employed in the same way for a livelihood.

Bertha sighed, and, for a moment, was silent.

"There is not the similarity you think," she then said. "Just now, our positions are a good deal alike ; but it is only now. You have had an education which fits you for something better than sewing, if the charge of your little sister, as you say, permitted it ; while I have but recently had opportunity to improve the little instruction I received as a child. Your fate is a happy, happy one to mine, Mabel. You are beginning where I leave off ; or, I may say, you are at the top of the ladder at the offset, while I have reached it, step by step, through — well, through — what shall I say ? — through things it is likely you have neither heard nor dreamed of, and that, beginning where you do, you may thank God it is not likely you ever will *know* of."

"I have heard something of the hardships of a sewing-girl's life," rejoined Mabel, "though I have known nothing of it."

"Let me tell you something of mine," said her companion, "I was only eleven when I first began working for a living. I am now twenty-

two. My mother was a noble, good woman, and she spared no pains to teach me her own good principles. She taught me what has been all to me since, though she died when I was only turned of ten.

“My father brought me with him to Chicago, where there was a good opening for him to work. He was a bricklayer. He got a large job, and was well paid, and everything seemed to be looking promising for us. We had taken rooms with a family on Clark street; and, one evening, about eight weeks after our coming to Chicago, I was looking for him to come home to supper, as I often did. It got to be late, and I thought it strange there was no sign of him, for he was very steady in his habits, and never stayed away after working hours. I went to the front step to look about, and, while I was there, I saw quite a number of people coming along, and, in their midst, two men carrying a settee, with something looking like a man covered up on it. I hadn't the smallest thought what it was, — oh, no! I only looked on like the rest, because it was something out of the way to stare at.

“Presently, just as the crowd had got a few

doors from where I stood, a little boy of the neighborhood ran up to me and called out, —

“ ‘ O Berthy, Berthy ! they’re bringing home your dead father. They didn’t know where he lived till Mr. Burns told them ; and now they’re bringing him home to be buried.’ ”

“ I felt as though it was some terrible dream I was in. I couldn’t move or speak. The settee was brought to the curb of the sidewalk, and I tried to go forward to it. I don’t know what happened after that, for I fell down ; and they had to carry me out of the way to bring the settee with the body of my poor father into the house.

“ He had fallen from a high scaffolding at the building where he worked, and was instantly killed by the fall.

“ The woman of the house was a good sort of woman, and she treated me well, — better, as I’ve found out since, than most would have done, though I didn’t think so then. In a little while, when I was able to work, she gave me such things to do as, she said, paid for my living ; and she fixed up one or two old black dresses of her own to be my mourning for my father, exchanging them for the good calicoes I had been wearing,

which she gave to her children. She was the only living creature I had to care for me in Chicago, — or, indeed, anywhere, — and I was willing to stay with her as long as I could.

“She soon found I was handier at my needle than at housework, and gave me sewing to do instead of rough jobs ; and, as I always liked sewing, I was well satisfied. So all did very well till my old black clothes began to wear out, and she told me, as my work didn’t pay for more than my board and lodging, she couldn’t give me anything new, but only old ones again to patch up. I’d have stood this satisfied enough, but for some of the neighbors who had seen my work, telling me that if I got regularly paid for it, I’d get more than enough to buy new clothes, besides food and lodging. I believed them, for they offered me a right good price themselves ; so I told her about it, and she said I might do as I liked.

“I worked first for one, then for another, and in this way got to be a regular sewing-girl before I was twelve years old. I learned to work on the sewing-machine too, and that was a great thing for me. I wouldn’t have asked anything

better than to get along as I was doing now, if I could all the time have got work as I began with. But this didn't last. Many times for a whole week I couldn't get more than one or two days' sewing to do; and this put me back so that I was often wanting not only shoes and clothes, but even enough to eat.

"Seeing it wouldn't do to depend on families for work, I got the woman I now lodged with to introduce and recommend me to a clothing-store to do machine-sewing. But though I could work as fast and a good deal better than many of the grown girls employed, the man would give me little more than half pay, though his best pay was so small that it was only with the closest pinching a girl could continue to live by it at all. Disappointed again, I determined to work for this man only at such times as I was entirely without customer work; and by managing this way, I believed I should get along. A woman, who had sometimes given me work, chanced to come to me after I had been working in the store a few weeks, and offered me three days' sewing in her house. Of course I gladly took it. With her I got

sixty cents a day, and my meals besides; in the store I got twenty-five cents a day, and had to find myself. Such opportunities as she gave me, occurring once in a while, I saw would enable me to come a good deal nearer to what might be called *living*, than the way I'd been getting along for the past weeks.

“Ignorant child that I was! I didn't know yet one half the hardness of my employer. When at the end of the three days I returned to him for work, he asked if it was sickness had kept me away. I had been taught by my mother to tell the truth; and though I suspected from the look and tone of the man that it might be against me now, I honestly explained what had kept me from the store, saying that *to live* I must take customer work when I could get it. Then I learned how entirely hard and soulless was this man,—how less than nothing it was to him that I was a poor orphan child, with no one to look to but myself,—only my two feeble hands between me and starvation from cold and hunger. I was to work for him the six days out of the seven, so long as he should want me, and for his own niggardly prices; at the

same time liable to be dismissed at any moment ; or, I should not work for him at all.

“ Had he been willing to pay me at the same rate as girls a few years older, I would willingly have bound myself to him ; but I could not live on the short pay he gave me, and saying so, I left him. I spent that day trying to get a place somewhere else, and by evening succeeded. With my new employer I was obliged to bind myself as the first insisted ; but then he was willing to make a slight advance on my former wages, bringing them nearer to that he paid the full-grown girls. I got thirty-five cents a day. I was now all the time sewing, and striving to live by the sewing ; busy at the store, on the machine, or at basting and button-hole making, from seven to six ; and, after my return home, engaged until a late hour of the night with hand-sewing on such customer work as I could get. At other times it was my own sewing I was busy with, or the washing of my clothes, — for I couldn't, of course, pay for the doing of it ; and so night after night I was employed for hours after I should have been in bed. There were no more cheerful little talks with people who em-

ployed me; no more cutting out and fitting, and change of one sort or another to enliven my toil; it was the ceaseless, hard taskwork, with small wages, done in forced silence, and under the eye of a hard taskmaster; or the solitary home work, dragged through weary night hours, with feeble light and crushed spirit. To be sure there were plenty of others doing just as myself; but that didn't in the least mend the matter; and as we sat at our store-work, each of us only read in the faces around her the same dreary day-in and day-out story she was going over in her own heart.

"After struggling along for a while, I found that to keep the snug little room I had been occupying, and to board with the nice family I was with, were comforts I could not afford; so I looked about for a cheaper way of living. There were three girls working for my employer, who lodged together in a house where there were both lodgers and boarders, and they told me I could find accommodation there; and I applied for it and got it. Here my expenses were a good deal lessened; but very soon I learned to look back to the time spent in the quiet place

I had left as a time of happiness to what I now knew. This crowded boarding-house was noisy and disorderly, and filled with so many strange people, that I was at first quite frightened. I told you that my mother was a good woman, and that she had striven to give me good morals and good habits. I was only eleven when I lost her; but Providence,—I will not call it *chance*, Mabel,—had ever since placed me with persons who lived decently. They seemed to respect the good training I had had, and to be unwilling to place anything in my way likely to change me for the worse. How different it all was now! A good many of the lodgers were sewing-girls, striving, like myself, to eke out a living from their poorly paid work. Some of them had, from the first, impressed me unfavorably, and upon a nearer acquaintance I liked them still less. But I could make little, if any, choice between them and others, associated as we were together; especially as I had to share a room with several.

“I at times look back with a feeling of terror to the four years I spent in that house, and in others, that left me no more choice in my com

panions. I saw so much, I heard so much, — I was so mixed up with wrong-doing, with temptations, misery, and despair. God only knows how I came out of it unhurt. Yes, he knows; for he kept always before me the thought of my mother — my good, pure mother, whose lessons I couldn't forget. O Mabel! I saw in those times every turn and move of a poor sewing-girl's life. I saw their trials and temptations, their weakness, their remorse, and their suffering. I saw too, how many a one whose place it was to pity, guide and encourage them to good, — their very employers even! — plotted to lead them to evil. Oh, surely there were temptations enough in their pinching poverty, the actual starvation often staring them in the face, without this! There were girls I knew who had much good in them, and that wanted to live virtuously and honestly, and had struggled long to do so; yet I knew of more than one of these dropping off from among us, and being seen no more in the busy places they had filled. I heard of them, — I heard how they had been driven into wrong by want and trouble, or enticed into it by artful workers. I heard things,

Mabel Ross, that would make your heart ache, and your blood boil to know; but I will not tell them to you. I would be happier and easier at this moment if I could forget them all myself, — if I could forget all the world's injustice and oppression I learned in those four years. Though I did no wrong myself, I often feel almost as remorseful as though I had, those things have left such ugly places in my memory, — they have taken so much of the happy, young feeling out of me.

“It will only be a few months now before I am married, and it is a real good young man will make me his wife. Since I have known this young carpenter I've felt worse than ever about those miserable four years; and I think I'd be willing to give any four of those coming to forget them. I'd be so much happier as the simple girl I was before; I'd feel myself so much worthier the love of this good young man.”

“How did you get a place at Mr. ——'s?” Mabel inquired.

“Through the young carpenter. A friend of his boarded in the house where I lodged. He knew, well as I did, the trials we poor sewing-

girls were put to, and became a true friend of mine because he saw I could not be led to wrong. He spoke kindly of me to George Hallet, and in that way brought us together. George had influence to get me on trial at Mr. ——'s, and I did my best to give satisfaction, so got fixed in the place I have now. At Mr. ——'s I'm easy and happy to what I was before, and believe I needn't fear knowing again such dark days as I have come through."

The two girls had now arrived at the corner where they generally parted; and Bertha Giles turned in the direction of her home, leaving Mabel to pursue the way to hers, not only graver but sadder for the story she had just heard

CHAPTER V.

HILDA AND HER MYSTERY.



ON her return home one evening, Mabel found Hilda awaiting her. The look and manner of the latter showed considerable excitement, and Mabel felt satisfied that something had gone wrong at cousin Algin's. She was not left long in doubt concerning what was the something wrong.

"I told you long ago, Mabel," Hilda said, turning abruptly from the caresses of little Lilly, whom she had brought home, "I told you that I saw the time was coming when I couldn't stand being at cousin Algin's. It's come at last, though not so soon as I looked for. I've left her for good."

"I'm sorry, Hilda," her sister very gravely replied. "I mean sorry that you couldn't be as

well pleased with cousin Algin as she was with you."

"She wasn't pleased with me at all," Hilda quickly replied; "it was only make believe."

"She asked for you herself, Hilda, and seemed to want to do well by you," said Mabel. "But I have nothing to say now about that," she added, seeing the cloud gathering on her sister's brow. "Since you were not content to stay, you were right to come directly to me."

"You don't look over-pleased to see me, for all," remarked Hilda, gloomily.

"If I am not, it is on your own account, Hilda," Mabel sadly rejoined. "Oh, my sister! if you knew as I do the trials and sufferings of poor sewing-women, you would value the home you have left. How I have thought of you, Hilda, as I have learned more of these things; and how anxiously I have watched you, hoping to see you more content at cousin Algin's."

"There's no need to try frightening me, Mabel. I can't go back again. Cousin Algin and I are quits."

"You have not quarrelled, Hilda?"

"No ; for there was no need of it. I just told her I was going to leave her, and try and get along some other way ; she — well, she said I could go."

"How did she say it, Hilda ? Tell me all, my sister. You know our dear mother left you to cousin Algin."

"Always reminding me of *that*, Mabel, to make me feel badly !"

"No, Hilda ; only to keep you from doing what you may sometime be sorry for."

"Well, she wasn't a bit surprised ; and it would have been funny if she were, when she's been seeing, for long, how things were working. She knows pretty much what I think of her ; she knows, too, that I've got my suspicions about something. She's too smart and too conscious not to know *that*."

"You talk mysteries, Hilda. I wish you would be plainer."

"I will, Mabel. I stayed at cousin Algin's this over a year just for *one thing*, and when that thing was done, there was nothing more to keep me there ; not, I mean, that I succeeded about that one thing, or, at least, that I got any real satisfaction about it ; but I made a good, bold trial for it, and,

though it ended in a failure, I'm proud at this minute that I made it."

"My dear sister! do you call this being plain?"

Hilda laughed, — a rare thing with her now, — but when she did laugh, it was with a merry, ringing tone pleasant to hear. The sound of her own voice seemed to cheer her spirits, for she went on in a different tone from before.

"It must seem a funny mystery to you, to be sure," she said; "and it's nonsense in me to say, I'll be plain about it; for that's a thing I've made up my mind is not for the best. The truth is, Mabel, if you were a different girl from what you are, — a little bit on the *harum scarum*, like me, I'd let you into the whole secret; but being the staid, close-thinking, and afraid-of-doing-something-the-least-bit-out-of-the-way sort of girl you are, I prudently say to myself 'Hilda! you keep that thing to yourself, if you want anything to come of it.'"

Mabel smiled; yet still it was in a grave tone she remarked, —

"It does not seem to me there can safely be mysteries between us, Hilda. I should like to know just what is on your mind."

“To be made worried and anxious for nothing,” lightly rejoined her sister. “Now, if you’d known what’s been on my mind these months, Mabel, you’d have been talking to me about it, and discouraging me, and putting all sorts of objections in the way of my working it out ; and, maybe, even letting cousin Algin herself get an inkling of it. As it is” —

“Well, Hilda, — as it is ?”

“As it is, Mabel, you’ve had no worry about it, and you know nothing ; so I’m left free to try some other plan of working. I’ve done all I can *in* the house ; now I’ll try and see what can be done *out* of it. There’s more than one way of working at everything, and, as my first plan has failed me, I’ll find another.”

“My dear sister ! you will presently find there is but one way to work at what is before you now, — the making of a living, — and that is from seven till six, for six days of the week. It is not likely you will find time to busy yourself about these fancies that have been bewildering you.”

“I’m not afraid of the work, Mabel. You’re thinking of cousin Algin that day by dear moth-

er's bedside, — *the stone around your neck!* You're afraid I'll be a drag on you."

"No, Hilda; I am not afraid."

"Nor need you be. Just you wait and see! In leaving cousin Algin, I've thrown myself on *myself*, Mabel, not on *you*."

"On that account I have neither fear nor regret, Hilda; my only concern is your acting contrary to the solemn injunctions of our mother."

"Get that idea out of your head, Mabel. Mother never would have thought of parting us; it was cousin Algin's planning altogether."

Mabel made no rejoinder. She was sitting on the little settee, with Lilly between Hilda and herself, her hand and that of the latter joined in that of the little girl. Lilly had listened with attention to the conversation between her sisters, and at this pause, looking earnestly into the face of the last speaker, said, —

"Mother's all the time watching us, Hilda; and she thinks as much about our being happy and good now as she did when she was with us. I wouldn't, oh, not for the world! do anything to worry dear mother."

Hilda stared at the child, glanced at Mabel, then, catching Lilly in her arms, burst into tears.

"Neither would I, dear Lilly!" she cried; "don't you think, child, that I'd do anything that would distress dear mother, if she were indeed like a spirit among us."

"She *is* among us," said the child, solemnly; "she hears us, and she sees us. Mabel says it's so, and I *know* it. I feel it all the time."

Tears were in Mabel's eyes, as well as Hilda's. She pressed a kiss upon the cheek of the little girl; and silence, for a time, fell upon them all.

But Hilda's feelings were particularly changeable; especially were her periods of subdued feeling of short duration. A moment more, and she had resumed the subject of her stay at her cousin Algin's.

"You would have had me take you into my confidence, Mabel?" she said, in a sort of half-vaunting, half-jesting way; "but how would you have felt to know what I was sometimes doing? Fancy, for instance, one night not long since, — a stormy, rainy night it was, — and me creeping out of my bed, between one and two before morning, creeping, creeping downstairs, passing cousin

Algin's room like a ghost, my heart fairly standing still at the slightest suspicion of a sound ; all in the dark, but with matches in my pocket to strike a light when I got to the end of my journey. I tell you, Mabel, what I went through that night was enough to frighten any dozen girls of my age out of their senses. But it didn't frighten *me*, or, at least, if it did, I didn't feel a bit like turning back, or being sorry I had undertaken it. Then the failure came. But I won't tell you about *that*, Mabel ; it would make you feel badly for nothing. You may be sure, though, that I managed to turn myself, — yes, and as cleverly as though I'd gone over it all before. And so I had, in my own mind ; for I'd thought, again and again, of all the things that might turn up, and how it would be best for me to act through each and every one of them. The best of it all is no one suspected me. They thought of burglars, the servants, any one but me."

Mabel had offered no interruption to this relation. She sat gazing on the speaker, her features pale, and a look of apprehension upon them.

"No one *suspected* you, Hilda? My sister! what is it you have attempted?"

"Nothing to make such a long face about, Mabel." And Hilda tried to force a laugh. "Besides, it's over now, and will never come *that* way again. As I said before, I'm going to work *out* of the house now."

When Mabel came to speak with Mrs. Kingsley about Hilda's leaving her, she found that lady perfectly good-tempered upon the subject.

"Hilda's a strange girl," she smilingly said; "and somehow I like her for her very oddity. She has a dash and sprightliness about her which enlivens a dull couple like your cousin Hugh and myself. But she wasn't content, and I didn't think it right to put constraint upon her. We will leave her alone, and probably she will, after a time, be content to return to us. There is one thing, Mabel, I wish you both to understand, — our house is always open to her, when she feels disposed to make it her home."

Mabel thanked her cousin warmly. She was much impressed with her kindness of manner, and scarcely thought Hilda deserved so much forbearance at her hands. When she reported to Hilda the result of their peace conference, the latter looked queerly at her.

“All for effect,” she said. “Cousin Algin understands that admirably. She invites me to come back, — does she? Well, maybe I will, — sometime ; but it’ll be a visit of a sort she doesn’t look for.”

CHAPTER VI.

HILDA A SEWING-GIRL.



ABEL would have been pleased, could she have procured sufficient work from her old customers to keep Hilda employed at home, as the latter could then have taken charge of little Lilly. But, failing in this, and seeing it would be necessary for her sister to find employment in some of the stores, she lost no time in having her taught the operation of the sewing-machine.

A fee of three dollars procured the necessary instruction, and, in a few weeks' time Hilda was competent to machine work ; and after some trouble and further delay, Mabel succeeded in procuring her a place in one of the clothing-stores. Here the young girl applied herself to her labors with such industry as surprised, while it delighted, her sister. Her humors were so changeable, and her temper so uncertain, that Mabel had enter-

tained great fears for her, under these new circumstances. Mabel had heard enough of the character of Hilda's employer, — though he was, probably, but little worse than the generality of his class, — to know there was neither consideration nor ordinary feeling to be looked for at his hands ; and, in thought of her sister's impatience and odd independence of character, she looked for an abrupt termination of her duties, almost as soon as entered upon. Not so, however. Hilda either found her present trials more tolerable than her sister had apprehended, or brought to her aid a philosophy for which Mabel had not given her credit.

Hilda's sole concern appeared to be that, with all her efforts, she could not make sufficient to defray the actual addition of expense she was and had been to Mabel. The latter endeavored to reassure her on this point. The rent of her rooms, she reminded her, was not increased by their occupation by a third comer, while Hilda's addition to their little treasury, trifling though it was, covered what additional expense was incurred by her presence.

Still Hilda was not satisfied.

"If I could only work as you do, Mabel," she,

one evening, said to her, "I'd somehow contrive to get a better price for my work. I wonder why I was made so good-for-nothing, while you're good for everything!"

"I am pretty good at sewing, and am thankful for it," replied Mabel, who perceived that her sister was in one of her more desponding moods. "But remember, I have had a good deal more practice than you. If you persevere as you are doing now, you will, by and by, find yourself an excellent sewer."

"What I want is to get a place like you have at Mr. ——'s," rejoined Hilda, — "a place where the wages are a decent return for one's ten hours' hard work; but I don't expect to get it," she added. "I don't believe it's in me to be up to it. And even if it was, I might never get the chance to do my best, and be properly paid for it. There's Etta Burgess, who's as good a work-woman as you'd wish to see; and yet she's glad to get her two and three dollars a week with Lellerman. And Mattie Rivers, too, — I'd give a good deal to sew like Mattie, — she could take any place in Chicago, yet she has to drag along on her forty or fifty cents a day, like the rest of them. If I were

alone, Mabel, I'd make no headway at all on the mean thirty-five or forty cents I get."

"But you are not alone, Hilda."

"Still I can't forget the near three weeks I lived on you, Mabel, while I learnt to sew on the machine," Hilda added, after a pause; "and, worse than that, the money you had to pay to have me taught. I haven't said much about it; but it's never out of my thoughts."

"That is wrong," Mabel returned. "You shouldn't trouble yourself about it, Hilda. Which is Mattie Rivers?" she then abruptly asked; "the one that walked home with you, Saturday evening?"

"Yes, she lives on Lasalle Street; but she comes this way to keep me company. I like her ever so much."

Mabel looked grave. She was preparing little Lilly for bed, and glanced up from her employment to the face of Hilda, as she said, —

"Why encourage her to put herself out of her way, Hilda? It would be better for you to be alone, than to have company not suited to you."

"And why isn't Mattie Rivers suited to me?" and Hilda fired up a little. "She's a poor sewing-

girl, and so am I. Surely you're not getting proud, Mabel? It's not for us to be that."

"I have one sort of pride, Hilda, and would like you to have the same: it is a pride to keep strictly to the path of right and decency. We are but poor sewing-girls, to be sure, and for that very reason should regard appearance closely. We have nothing but our good characters, my sister, and cannot value them too highly."

"And hasn't Mattie a good character, too, Mabel? And what right have you to think that she doesn't value it?"

Mabel didn't immediately reply. Before her mind's eye was the picture of Mattie Rivers, and she turned from it with a feeling of disapproval which she did not altogether care to explain. Neither the dress, nor the manner and general appearance of her sister's new companion quite answered her ideas of a modest young woman.

"I trust she has a good character, Hilda, and that she values it," she presently said. "Poor girl! I trust so, indeed. But it is not every one, my sister, who has been blessed with so good a mother as ours, to give the altogether right view of things, and it can be no advantage to you to be

much with girls who have been less carefully brought up."

"And how do you know what sort of a bringing up Mattie has had? Perhaps, Mabel, it has been good as our own."

"Is her mother living, Hilda?"

"I don't know; I never heard her say a word about her mother. But I suppose she has one, or has had one, any way. Most people have had mothers. But what has that got to do with the matter?"

"Everything to do with her bringing up, Hilda, as you know."

"Oh, yes, of course; I forgot. Well, most likely Mattie, one time or other, had a mother, and so a bringing up, too."

"The poor girl is probably an orphan, like ourselves."

Mabel spoke very gravely; for there was still before her the picture of the disapproved Mattie.

"And for that reason we ought to have some feeling for her," said Hilda, warmly. "I have, anyhow. I like her."

"Like her, Hilda, have every kind feeling for her, and do her such service, too, as you can; but,

— don't be intimate with her. I am so anxious concerning the associates you form, Hilda. Everything in a young girl's start in life depends on her companions."

"For the matter of that, Mabel, 'beggars mustn't be choosers.' Maybe Mattie Rivers, nor Etta Burgess neither, aint *quite* the sort of girl I'd choose if we were living as we once were. They don't dress well, and they're a little rude and free in their manners; besides which, they can scarcely read and write. But then, they're kind and obliging to me, and they're sociable and off-hand in their ways, and—I like them. 'Birds of a feather,' you know, 'flock together;' and sewing-girls will mostly be found with sewing-girls."

Mabel saw the force of the reasoning, and looked troubled. Since her sister had not the discrimination she desired, how was she to give it to her?

Lilly, being now ready for bed, knelt at her sister's feet to repeat her nightly prayer.

Hilda, who saw the advantage she had gained in the argument with Mabel, and, perhaps, over-estimated it, was about to add something she believed would settle it yet more completely in her favor,

when the voice of the child broke the silence which had followed her own last words.

Delaying the remark for a future occasion, Hilda fixed her eyes upon the little suppliant.

The child's prayer followed, concluding, as usual, with, "God bless my dear sisters and all my friends."

"*Amen*, my darling," added Mabel, finding Lilly pause.

Lilly pressed the hand which held her own, and raised her eyes from her sister's lap to give her a glance.

"Something more, Mabel," she whispered; then, raising her voice again, added, her head once more bowed on Mabel's knee, —

"God please to take *great care* of dear sister Hilda, and put in her heart to go the way Mabel wants her to go; for Christ's sake. *Amen*."

Mabel's eyes and Hilda's met. A cloud had gathered on the brow of the latter.

"Mabel!" she exclaimed, glancing quite angrily from her to the little girl.

In reply Mabel put her fingers to her lips with a deprecatory glance, then, lifting Lilly to her feet, pressed a kiss upon her lips.

"Good-night, my darling, and God bless you," she said.

"Good-night, dear Mabel. Hilda, dear, good-night."

"Good-night, child." But Hilda did not kiss the little face held up to her.

A look of grieved surprise came over the features of the child, and Lilly drew a step back, but did not move away.

"Hilda!" said Mabel, in a tone of gentle reproof; then added, to the child, "Kiss Hilda's hand for good-night, Lilly. She loves you dearly."

Lilly kissed the hand, looked timidly into Hilda's face; then, having softly repeated her "good-night," passed round to her bed.

For some time no word was exchanged between the older sisters, — Mabel busying herself in putting away little Lilly's clothes, while Hilda sat on the sofa, absently regarding her.

Then Mabel began to prepare her sewing-machine to work. This was the time she generally devoted to her own and Lilly's sewing, and she had quite a little pile of garments on hand now. It was a delightful thing to Mabel so

to employ herself, — pleasant to her to know that the sound of her sewing-machine was a soothing lullaby of which her young sister never wearied. The little instrument “clicked” busily now for some time, no other sound breaking the silence of the room. Mabel, meanwhile, was thinking gravely over the occurrences of the past half hour, — Hilda, to all appearance, thinking very busily of something too.

“I don’t know what to make of that child, Mabel,” then abruptly said the latter, quite a sharp tone in her voice. “Am I to understand she’s put up to this sort of thing?”

“Certainly not, Hilda. It is all her own thought, poor darling.”

“So strange!” muttered Hilda.

“Strange, maybe, but perfectly natural, Hilda. I am sorry you were so unkind to her.”

“I couldn’t help it, and I think I was right. I’m not going to encourage her in disrespect, — I mean what looks like disrespect. But it’s all over now, and there’s nothing more to be said about it.”

CHAPTER VII.

LITTLE LILLY.



IN the following morning Hilda still showed coldness in her manner to the little Lilly ; which proved that the impression of the previous evening had remained longer than impressions generally did with her. Lilly was quick to perceive this, and endeavored in her gentle way to conciliate her sister ; though it is not likely she knew, poor child, exactly how she had offended. Vainly she sought to have it all made right by a kiss when Hilda should leave to go to her work ; the latter slipped off without giving her an opportunity to offer it.

It was about noon, when, in the room where she worked at Mr. ——'s, Mabel received notice that some one was desiring to see her. With a feeling of undefinable apprehension, she hastened to present herself to the applicant. It was the

person with whom she had some hours before left the little Lilly.

The coming of this woman, her pale countenance and alarmed expression, told Mabel, before a word had been spoken, that something had befallen the child.

"It's not much, I expect," said the woman, in reply to her hurried inquiry, but in a tone that to poor Mabel's ear contradicted the words, "only a fall, poor little dear. But as she was set on seeing you, I thought it best to come round."

Mabel hurriedly made application for permission to leave, and this being given, lost no time in getting home.

"Your sister has come, Lilly," said a neighbor of Mabel's, as the latter appeared in the room.

On the bed over which the speaker bent lay little Lilly, her face pale as death, and a look of agony on every feature. She checked the sharp cry about to escape her, and tried to smile reassuringly on her sister.

"It is not *very* bad, Mabel," she whispered. "Maybe I'm more frightened than hurt."

These were the words Mabel was in the habit of saying upon occasions of trifling accidents to

the child ; and as she heard them now, in faint and broken accents, and with appearances of suffering which the little one vainly strove to hide, they went with a pang of agony to her heart.

Some one had thoughtfully sent for a doctor, and very soon after Mabel's coming he appeared. After a careful examination, he informed Mabel that he found no bones broken ; but that, as it was evident the little girl was in much suffering, it was likely some internal injury had been received, though he could not yet determine its nature. It would have been strange, indeed, if no other injury than the few bruises apparent were the result of the fall down an entire flight of steep steps, which little Lilly had suffered, and poor Mabel hung upon the words, "some internal hurt" in an agony of apprehension.

A tranquillizing medicine was, under the physician's direction, given the little sufferer, and before very long she became quieted, and finally slept. Yet, even in sleep, how pale and pinched appeared the little features ! Her last words had been that her pains had ceased ; but, as Mabel tearfully regarded her, lying thus, she could not but fancy they still were racking the little frame.

The doctor and the neighbors retired, and the sister remained alone beside the sleeping child, alternately lifting her heart in prayer that God would bring speedy relief to the little sufferer, and weeping at sight of the sad change on the infant face.

A while after six, Hilda returned home. Mabel heard her quick step approaching the room, and hurried out to prevent her too precipitate entrance ; for the condition of Lilly was one that rendered strict quiet necessary. A very few words explained what had happened, and Hilda followed her sister into the room, as quietly as she could have desired.

The pale face on the pillow was scarcely paler than that of the new-comer, as she bent it over the still little form. There was a look of remorseful sorrow also on the countenance of Hilda, which awakened the pity of Mabel, for she well understood it. Could either of them forget the little occurrence of the last evening, or Hilda's parting with the child that morning ?

And had little Lilly forgotten it ? Oh, no ! It spoke in the look of sweet forgiving love, which, upon waking, she bent on Hilda, and in the affec-

tionate twining of her arms about her neck, as the latter hung weeping over her.

"I'd like to keep my arms hugging you, dear Hilda," she said, as she let them fall by her side again, "only I can't, it hurts me so. But don't cry, Hilda, — don't cry, Mabel. To-morrow, Lilly will be all right again."

Hilda withdrew her eyes from the child's face to that of Mabel. It was a look of apprehension the sisters exchanged, and each turned from the look with greater grief at heart.

To-morrow, little Lilly would be all right again? Ah! no one who looked upon her now could think it possible. Yesterday, — this very morning, the little form was full of health and strength; but many a morrow might dawn without finding it the same.

"Some internal hurt, the doctor thinks it may be," whispered Mabel.

"He told you nothing more than that?"

"No. Perhaps he didn't wish to say just what he thought, for fear of discouraging me. But I fear myself it is some hurt to the back, — some inward hurt."

“ Mabel, do you remember poor Cora Fielding ? ”

“ Yes, Hilda.”

Hilda covered her face and turned abruptly away ; then, catching to her breast the little hand which lay motionless beside Lilly, she bent her head on the bed and burst into passionate weeping.

“ Don’t cry, Hilda ! Oh, don’t cry so ! ” said the child.

“ I must, Lilly,” sobbed Hilda. “ My heart is breaking for my naughtiness to you. Don’t you care whether Hilda cries or not. Don’t trouble your dear, precious little heart about her. She was naughty last night, — she was naughty this morning. She deserves to suffer.”

“ Poor, poor Hilda ! ” And, evidently with an effort that caused no slight pain, the other little hand was laid caressingly upon her sister’s head. “ Hilda is never naughty. Lilly loves her dearly.”

“ And will Lilly pray for her again, like she did last night ? Will she ask God to give her a good, kind heart, like Lilly’s own ? ”

A smile lighted, for a moment, the pale features of the child, as a ready assent was given.

“Pray for me always, darling. God will surely hear you, when you speak so kindly for your sister.”

Mabel did not go to Mr. ——’s on the following morning, nor did she see prospect of going for a long while to come. She could not leave the little sufferer, who took such solace from her presence, and whose helpless condition required her constant attention.

It was with a heavy heart that Hilda that morning went to her labors. The shadow which had fallen on their humble home had fallen on the spirits of the strange girl with a gloom she believed she should never throw off. In the evening, before returning home, she went to Mrs. Lemming’s to acquaint Minnie with the accident which had befallen their little Lilly.

Mrs. Lemming showed considerable concern upon hearing it, and gave consent to Minnie going immediately with Hilda to visit her sister.

Minnie’s visits *home* — as she called those made to her sister’s — had never been so frequent as she or they desired, and they had latterly become yet less so. Indeed, owing to various obstacles, for some unexplained reason placed in the way by

Mrs. Lemming, her appearance in Mabel's rooms had come to be quite an event for her sisters and herself.

Very sad was the visit she now made, and many and sorrowful the tears she shed over the stricken Lilly. Her grief was not of the turbulent, convulsive sort of Hilda's, but more like Mabel's, in its quiet, subdued expression.

"I wish I could stay, Mabel, if it was but a morning or a day," said Minnie, "that I might do something for poor little Lilly. I've never felt so badly about being from home as I do now, — no, not from the first."

"You'd soon find things so different here from what you're used to," remarked Hilda, not giving Mabel time to reply, "that you'd tire of it. And as to doing something for Lilly, what sort of a nurse would you make with that delicate barege dress on?"

The last words were added in a little bitterness of tone, as she glanced from the visitor's thin dress to her own homely one of cotton.

"It's not my fault, Hilda," replied Minnie, with a hurt look. "Don't you believe I'd be glad

to come with a dress better suited, and make myself useful, helping Mabel? Don't *you* believe it Mabel?"

"I do Minnie; and so does Hilda," was the reply. "We all know you would be one of us, if you could, Minnie."

Without designing it, Mabel's words added a point to those of Hilda. "She would be *one of them*, if she could." They all felt, then, that she was not one of them.

Knowing that her sister meant no unkindness by the remark, Minnie turned her eyes away from her, that she might not see that they had pained her.

"I think I'll ask Mrs. Lemming to let me come and spend a day with you, Lilly dear," she said, when taking leave. "Would you like me to come, Lilly? I would fan you to sleep, like Mabel does."

"It would be nice," replied the child; "and Mabel could work on her sewing-machine without running to me all the time."

"Mrs. Lemming will never let you do it," observed Hilda; "it would be too altogether out of the prim way she's marked out for you. You're

‘the lady,’ of the family, Minnie, and have got to keep up the lady’s part. Beside, what would Clara Dean say to your playing nurse?”

“I wouldn’t care what she said, if Mrs. Lemming would let me do it,” replied Minnie.

The earnestness of her tone was not lost upon the observant little Lilly, who raised her arms to invite her to an embrace, and Minnie pressed kiss after kiss upon the lips and brow of the little sufferer.

“You’d better hurry and put on your bonnet, Minnie,” observed Hilda. “I promised Mrs. Lemming to see that you were at home by supper-time.”

Minnie kissed her little sister again, and turned to put on her bonnet, as directed.

“Some of the disadvantages of being *a lady*,” said Hilda, a little maliciously. “A lady mustn’t be seen alone in the street after dark, — not even a little lady of only twelve years old. I don’t know but I’d rather be only a common sewing-girl, that can come and go as I like.”

“How can you, Hilda?” said Mabel, in a gently reproachful tone. “Come, kiss me, Minnie,” she added, “and kiss Lilly again, too. You’re

a good, kind girl, and we all love to have you home with us. I will speak to Mrs. Lemming myself, and ask her to let you come oftener to see us, now poor little Lilly is hurt."

CHAPTER VIII.

A SEARCH FOR WORK.



IT was well Mabel had laid by every little amount of money she could spare; for now came the time she needed it. There were daily comforts required for Lilly, which it would have grieved her sister to see her go without. Not only were the medicines necessary for the little sufferer expensive, but, her appetite having become particularly delicate, she must have suffered for want of nourishment had there not been procured her such wholesome delicacies as tempted her.

It was about the fifth day after little Lilly's accident that Mabel began to look about her for home-work to do. She had heard too much of the niggardly prices paid for labor at the clothing stores to make application at any of them until other opportunities failed her, and she made her first efforts among her old customers, stating

the condition of little Lilly, which prevented her remaining at Mr. ——'s. But those who had formerly employed her had now found some one else to attend to their regular sewing, and were not disposed to make a change in her favor. One or two of them said, indeed, that, were she able to come to their house to work, they could employ her ; but, as they wished to superintend their work, it was quite impossible to give it out.

Several hours of several days were spent by Mabel in these fruitless efforts ; then, resolved to leave little Lilly no more, as she had done for this purpose, to strangers, she made application at one of the large clothing-stores. Determined to go from one to another of these till she should procure work to take home with her, she was not so much disappointed to find this first application unsuccessful. Unfortunately, however, for the applicant, the busier part of the season had not yet fairly set in, and she soon saw, that to procure work at all she must take it at inferior prices.

She had been refused at two or three places, when she entered a store on Lake street. She bore with her a written recommendation from her

former employer, and she tendered this to the man who presented himself, as she had done at previous places. He glanced his eye over it.

"Your work may be good for some, yet not suit me," he bluntly said. "I choose to judge for myself of work done on my goods."

"Have you work to give me?" asked Mabel. "If so you can judge if my sewing suits you."

A little more talk like this, interspersed with remarks from the man regarding the dulness of the season for work, resulted in his offering a dozen flannel shirts as a test of Mabel's abilities.

"How much do you pay for these?" Mabel asked.

"I give one dollar a dozen, — *you finding the thread.*"

Mabel was aghast. Her mind readily summed up the number of hours it would take her to complete the dozen, and perceived she would be paid but something like thirty-five or forty cents for her day's work. Yet what was she to do? She thought of the little sufferer at home, looking anxiously, painfully for her return. She thought of the absolute necessity there was for

some money to be made, with such a trifle remaining of the little she had stored away, and came to the conclusion that forty, or even thirty-five cents a day was better than nothing.

"I will take the shirts," she said; "and perhaps, when you find them well done, you will be willing to pay me better for others?"

There was no response to this "perhaps."

"I'm particular about my work," said the man; "and let me have that dozen shirts just as soon as possible."

Mabel left the store with the flannel, and hurried home to her expectant little Lilly.

"Poor Mabel's so tired," said the child, as her sister bent down to kiss her; "her cheeks are as white as anything."

Mabel's cheeks were indeed white. Her heart was heavy, her hopes seeming to fade out; for all misfortunes appeared coming upon her at once. One fact was staring her in the face, — one prognostic tearing at her heart-strings, — she was entering upon the downward path of the sewing-girl. She was leaving behind her cheering work and cheering prices; she was entering upon that dreary, dark path of wearisome work and nig-

gantly pay, which she had heard pictured by many who had trod it. She was beginning the battle for life, — life for herself and her little Lilly, — to be snatched from the hands of the ruthless and unfeeling, the grasping taskmaster, the heartless employer of the poor sewing-women.

That evening, when little Lilly lay soothed by the medicine which alone brought her entire ease, Mabel commenced her labors upon the dozen shirts.

Hilda sat reading to her, till wearied by the employment; when she stretched herself on the sofa, half musing, half dozing.

“How long do you intend to work at these shirts, Mabel?” she asked, after some time had thus been passed.

“Until twelve. I want to get them finished by Saturday evening.”

“I’m sure it must be near twelve now,” said Hilda.

“Only fifteen minutes after eleven,” returned her sister, having consulted her watch, — the precious watch which had come to her through the hands of both parents.

“What a long, long evening! — I mean night, Mabel.”

"Why have it so long? Undress, and go to bed, Hilda. You're trying yourself to no purpose by remaining up."

"Go to bed and leave you working all by yourself, Mabel? I couldn't do it. It's bad enough for you to be so pushed, without being left alone at your work."

"I shall not feel alone, Hilda, with you and dear Lilly in sight. I'm in better spirits than I've been all day ; for I've calculated time, and see that by sitting up to-night and to-morrow, the shirts will be done by Saturday evening ; and I can't believe but that this man will pay me better when he sees how well they are done."

"Now's the time my work would tell, Mabel, if I was able to take such a place as you had to give up at Mr. ——'s. Mabel! after all my talk and boast, I'm pretty much the stone about your neck, and have been from the day I came to you."

"Don't talk so, Hilda. You're doing your best, and that is all any one can do."

"You used to satisfy me that I was no great additional expense, Mabel ; but that was when you were at Mr. ——'s. But how different all is

getting to be, now! If dear little Lilly only could get well again!"

"Not so loud, Hilda. You know she sleeps very lightly, and it would make her unhappy to know what a grave change her accident has made for us."

"I never felt as if we were to go on as we were doing," said Hilda, after a pause. "Not that it was anything to the comfort we had known in times past, but because it was so much better than many another."

"It was indeed, Hilda. And we have still many blessings to be thankful for, — no *want*, my sister, — no seeing of our darling Lilly needing what we can't give her."

"Not yet, Mabel."

And Hilda looked off into the obscurity of the adjoining room, as though piercing through the *present* to the darkness of a coming day.

"Do you believe, Mabel," she, after a while, added, "that we are to be brought to such troubles as we hear of?"

"I trust not, my sister. But whatever trial God sees fit to bring us, be assured he will also give us

strength to bear, — that is, if we humbly look to him for it.”

As she ceased speaking, Mabel paused in her work, and, like her sister, looked off into the shadowy distance.

“If it were only thought of privation and struggle,” she presently said, “it would hold no terror for me; but, alas! the hour of trouble is often the hour of temptation, too. The weak must go down before it; the strong only, — the strong in a Christian faith, can bear up against the press of evils.”

“You fear for *me*, Mabel?”

The question was so faintly put that, but for the temporary stillness about them, Mabel had not heard it.

“Dear Hilda, can I help it? I know you for a good, pure-minded girl; but in the changed path which may be before us, others have stumbled who, perhaps, have started as fairly.”

“And, Mabel, if you’d heard much as I have of the cruel temptations put in their way, you would only wonder how so many have gone on steadily and honestly. But if excuses can be made for some, could any be made for *me*? No,

Mabel! With such a mother as ours, and with such a sister as you, if there's any good in me at all, — and you say there is, — you should have no cause for uneasiness."

"If I could only see you stronger, my sister, in that trust which is the safeguard against all."

"You shall, — you *will* see me stronger in it, Mabel. Look at yourself, — look at our poor Lilly! Can I be with you, and learn nothing of the goodness you are both made up of? There is Minnie. Do you think her sweet patience is thrown away upon me because I don't seem to make much of it? If I'm the last to catch the goodness of our dear mother, the last to profit by the lessons she taught us, I'll still come into it yet. O Mabel! can I forget dear mother? — can I forget *you*?"

"I am glad to have had this talk with you, Hilda," Mabel said, taking within her own the hand her sister, in her earnestness, had placed on her arm. "It has relieved my mind of a mountain-load. Let me know you always as I know you now, my dear ~~sister~~, and I shall have a mind at ease, whatever trial awaits us. You know that proverb of Solomon, — 'The rich man's wealth

is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty.' Let us resolve that poverty brings to us no destruction, and it will hold for us few terrors."

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THE NEW EMPLOYER.

CHAPTER IX.

MABEL'S NEW EMPLOYER.

BY four o'clock of Saturday afternoon, Mabel was round at the Lake street store with her dozen shirts neatly finished.

Her employer scanned her work with a critical eye. Had his real thought been known, it must have shown him not only satisfied, but much surprised, at the neatness and finish of the sewing ; for he was one of the meanest of the class to which he belonged, and could not look for such work as was now presented him for the pay which he gave. He was careful, however, that no token of satisfaction displayed itself upon his countenance.

"I suppose you are content with my work?" said Mabel, her eyes fixed earnestly on the lowered features of the man.

"It will do," was the reply, apparently reluctantly given. "I never look for very good work."

He opened the drawer of his counter, and handed her out a fifty-cent note.

"You have made a mistake," said Mabel. "You told me you paid a dollar a dozen for these shirts."

"A dollar to my regularly employed hands, but fifty cents only to one I don't know."

"Fifty cents wont do for me," said poor Mabel, emboldened by the necessity of her case. "The price you named was a dollar, and I must have it."

"Fifty cents is all you will get," said the hard man. "You will take it or none."

There rushed over poor Mabel thoughts of her weary hours spent on those dozen shirts, and of her poor Lilly needing what the withheld amount would procure her. In a sort of desperation, she made a bold move to right herself. Summoning all the appearance of composure she could, she lifted the dozen shirts, which still lay on the counter.

"You cannot have the shirts," she said, "till you pay me the promised price."

"What are you doing?" exclaimed the proprietor, coming quickly from behind the counter. "Put down my property, or I'll have you arrested."

Mabel had retired to the doorway, the shirts still on her arm.

"They are *my* property, until you pay the promised price of my work," she replied, in so sharp a tone as quite startled herself. "My necessities do not permit me to be imposed upon. Pay me the dollar, or you will have more trouble than the sum is worth to you."

"It's you will have the trouble," rejoined the man. "Give up my property, or you will get it."

But the clear, young eyes, with a temporary gleam of fierceness in them, were looking bravely and steadily into his own, and the craven quailed before them.

"Put down the shirts, and you will get the dollar," he said, in a changed tone.

"I have no trust in you. Hand me the money first."

He hastily produced a dollar note from his pocket-book, and, with one hand, extended it to Mabel, while, with the other, he caught the shirts from her arm. Mabel let them go and took the money.

"Mind you never come here again for work!"

he cried, as she hurried off. "There are plenty of girls in Chicago who will work for one dollar, or for fifty cents, — plenty of them."

Mabel trembled so she could scarcely walk. She was terrified at thought of what she had done, — terrified, because, one half minute before she entered the store just quitted, she would not have believed it possible she could be driven so to act and speak. The incident recalled her conversation of a night or two back with Hilda, and recalled it with grave concern. How was it possible to mark out a line of conduct, even for herself to follow, unknowing what moment some unlooked-for emergency might necessitate a contrary course? And if she could not mark such out for herself, how much less could it be done for her sister, whose impetuosity of character left her particularly open to sudden impressions?

Mabel would gladly have returned directly home after the painful occurrence just mentioned; but necessity did not permit this. There was no work awaiting her at home, and work must be procured. Her little store of money was melting away with a rapidity which made her painfully anxious for coming days; for, despite her cheerful

hopefulness of temper, there was too much depending on her individual efforts, for the burden not to press sorely upon her. She gave little expression to such anxieties as possible, wishing to uphold the hopes of others, even at the moment of her own greatest inquietude ; but the picture of the little sister, confided to her care by a dying mother, was ever before her, — that child now, by accident, brought to a condition of helplessness and suffering pitiable to see. This patient child to be deprived of the few comforts life yet held for her ! There was distraction in the thought for Mabel.

It was this desire to give all the solace in her power to Lilly, which kept her firm in the resolve to remain at home with her ; for her very presence was a comfort to the little sufferer. It was not only that the child clung to her with an affection and reliance she felt toward no other, but that the various attentions needed for the little girl's well-doing could not efficiently be rendered by the only substitute presented for Mabel herself. Hilda had no intuitive capacity for nursing, and was too hasty and impatient to acquire the ability. A profound wonder to her were those easy and efficient movements of Mabel, by which the latter contrived

to procure her little patient some change of position, that, while it effectually relieved present weariness, brought no after distress. For Hilda herself could scarcely touch the child without causing her serious inconvenience, and her consciousness of this inability rendered her yet more incompetent.

Mabel visited several clothing establishments seeking for work, and finally succeeded in procuring two dozen shirts, of the sort she had recently done, and on somewhat better terms, — that is, one dollar a dozen, but with the thread furnished her.

Considering herself, after her recent difficulties, fortunate to procure even these, she hastened home to relieve the neighbors, who had obligingly remained with Lilly during her absence.

“What did the new man say to your work, Mabel dear?” inquired the little girl soon as they were alone together.

“He said it would do, my darling.”

Mabel was preparing to sit down to her sewing-machine with her new invoice of flannels, and answered the question with a cheerfulness which

conveyed no impression of the distress she had suffered since leaving home.

"Is that all?" rejoined Lilly, in a disappointed tone. "Didn't he say it was neat and pretty?"

"No, dear Lilly. But no doubt he thought so, for I took pains to do it well."

"And did he pay you a bigger price? I heard you tell Hilda you thought he would."

"No, darling; he only paid me what he promised. But I have these others from a better man, and shall go to him no more."

"I'm glad you've found a better man, Mabel! And now just please move the pillows a little bit, so I can see you better as you sew. I'm so glad you're home again, and with plenty of work! Ah!" with a sigh of relief, as the change of position was made, "I'm in for a nice time now, Mabel dear! with you home, and the sewing-machine going click, click, the way I love."

Hilda was not so easily put off with replies as little Lilly had been, when, upon returning home, she plied Mabel with questions concerning her success with her Lake street employer.

"I can see that you have had just the sort of time with that old sharper that I expected,"

she said. "I had heard plenty of him, but wouldn't tell you, because you'd already got his work. I wouldn't say anything about your putting such fine work on his old flannels, neither, because I saw you were giving him such a fair chance to act decently, if he had it in him. But he hasn't. He's a mean, contemptible, soulless creature! To make a difficulty about giving you the pay he had promised, when such work as yours had never seen the inside of his store before! for I can tell you girls don't kill themselves taking pains for such prices as he pays. But what does he care? The things hold together till they're sold, and he has his profit off of them, and that is all he looks to."

Mabel went on steadily at her shirts for a week, working into the night hours, as she had done on the first. When Saturday came round again she was engaged on a new supply, having a day or two before taken home the first two dozen.

Mrs. Lemming had permitted Minnie to come to her sister's a little more frequently since the illness of Lilly, and upon each Saturday afternoon she made her appearance, to remain until the supper-hour. A sad pleasure it was to the

kind-hearted girl to devote these hours to the entertainment of her suffering little sister; and she never failed to bring with her some trifle calculated to amuse the child. Very grateful was Lilly for these attentions; not only for the temporary relief they afforded her weariness, but from the proof they gave her that Minnie had thought of her when away.

Upon the Saturday just mentioned above, she sat by Lilly's bed, amusing her with some newly-brought toy, while Mabel plied her sewing-machine near at hand. By and by Hilda returned home, and soon got into conversation with Mabel.

"I have something to propose to you, Hilda," Mabel said; — "something I have been thinking over in my own mind for this week past. I can barely make four shillings a day at shirts, and but little more at pantaloons. Now, if I understood vest-making, I could get so much more than this, that, in consideration of increasing expenses through the coming winter, and the little I had laid by being almost gone, it seems to me it would be well for me to learn. What do you think of it?"

"It would take you weeks to learn, Mabel;

and what would you do for a living in the meanwhile ? ”

“ It would take me three weeks only,” replied Mabel. “ I have known more than one who learned in that time. The three weeks would be a loss to be sure ; and more than that, as I shall have to pay something to learn ; but I am then insured a business that, while I have health to make long days at it, will keep us from want, at least.”

“ Still, Mabel, where is the money to live on for those three weeks, and to pay for learning ? ”

“ I will sell something, Hilda, or pawn something.”

Hilda opened her eyes very wide.

“ What is there we can spare ? ” she said, looking around the scantily furnished rooms.

“ There are one or two things we could do without,” replied Mabel ; — “ the bureau and settee for instance ; and, if they will not bring enough, — I mean the sale of them, — there is — something — I could pawn. I should be sorry to do it. I hoped not to be forced to it ; but we may

hereafter be obliged to make greater sacrifices if we don't make this now."

Hilda looked hard at Mabel again. What had they, the mere pawning of which would bring so much money as was needed for that more than loss of three weeks of Mabel's sewing? *One* thing only; and Hilda's eyes turned uneasily from her sister's face to a point just above the head of Lilly's bed, where hung the gold watch which had belonged to both their parents.

The look was enough, — the look and the meeting of the eyes that followed it; no word needed to be spoken.

Hilda sank into silence, while Mabel plied yet more busily her sewing-machine.

"I wish I had a grain of sense to help you!" said Hilda, at length, under depression of that humble estimate of herself which at times beset her; "but I haven't. I'm a mere child where any judgment is concerned."

"I think differently," returned Mabel; "and that is the reason I consult you. Two heads are better than one, Hilda, even if one does happen sometimes to think a little too fast."

"You're putting the best face on my failings,

as you always do, Mabel. It's provoking that the only wits I have are just the sort that can be turned to no account in the time of need!"

"Those inside eyes of yours, Hilda, — can they not be put to *outside* work for this emergency?"

Mabel spoke in something of forced playfulness; but Hilda's reply was given in all gravity.

"No; they're for different sort of work; they're to see close into things meant to be hid; while, what you want is a pair of experienced, sharp peepers that can look a long way ahead, and take count of all the probables and improbables that may turn up."

"Still, Hilda, do your best to aid me in the difficulty. If your opinion agrees with my own, I shall be better satisfied as to the course I take."

Hilda was silent for something like a minute. She appeared to be gravely reflecting, and, from time to time, stole hasty glances in the direction of the watch.

"If you leave it to me," she then said, "I decide in favor of the vest-making, cost us what sacrifice it may. Expenses now are above what we both together can make, and when constant fires have to be kept, — as they soon will be, — we

shall be getting into debt, which, I've heard you say hundreds of times, is the worst thing we could do. When you have once learned the vest-making, you will be able to make enough to keep us out of that, at least."

"Your conclusion is a good one," replied Mabel, "and agrees entirely with my own. By Wednesday evening I shall have this last dozen shirts finished, and I will then bring home no more."

CHAPTER X.

MINNIE.



ON Monday afternoon, Minnie unexpectedly presented herself before Mabel. There was a brighter look than customary in her eye as she kissed the latter and little Lilly, and a tint of color, too, on her usually pale cheek.

“You’ll get your shirts finished on Wednesday, Mabel?” she said, leaning over the back of her sister’s chair, as the latter sat at her sewing-machine.

“I hope to, dearest. Lilly has been so much better the last few days that I get a good deal more time for sewing.”

“And after that, you’ll work no more at shirts, — will you — but learn the vest-making, that pays so much better!”

“Yes, dear Minnie, I shall learn vest-making.”

“I know all about it,” whispered Minnie. “I

heard you and Hilda talking Saturday evening. And, *maybe*, Mabel, what I have here will save your having to — to pawn *the watch*. Oh, I wish it might! I've scarcely thought of anything else since I heard about it, Mabel; and I laid awake that night thinking of it, and making up my mind what I'd try to do. Take it, Mabel, and tell me if it will help you much."

With her arms passed over Mabel's shoulders, she put a small porte-monnaie on the sewing-machine.

"It is just ten dollars," she added, as her sister took it up. "I've been saving five of it a long while for you, and Mrs. Lemming added the other five this morning."

"Ten dollars? My dear little sister!" And Mabel caught the hands that lay on her shoulders and pressed them to her lips.

"Will it help you much, Mabel? Will it save the watch?"

"With a few things I can sell, it will, darling. Tell me how Mrs. Lemming happened to give you the five dollars."

"I asked her for it, Mabel. She often gives me a little money when she gives to Clara, and I'd

been laying it all by for *you*. I had five dollars, all but fifteen cents, and meant, when I got that much more, to bring it to you. But after I heard your talk with Hilda, Saturday evening, I saw five dollars wouldn't do much ; so I made up my mind I'd ask some more of Mrs. Lemming. She told me, — or *almost* told me, — when I first went to her, that I was never to expect her to help any *at home* ; but I thought, for all that, I'd try. She wasn't angry a bit, — she never is, — only — only that other five and the fifteen cents was all she'd give, and she said she gave it to *me*."

Mabel folded Minnie to her breast ; and, for a little while, both were silent.

" You are a kind, good girl," then said Mabel, " and have done a service to us all. But never, my darling, ask Mrs. Lemming for money again. She is kind to you, — she does much for you, and you should strictly obey her wishes. Now go to Lilly, my dear. She is wanting to kiss you for your kind gift."

Not for long had Minnie felt so happy, as, when bending over her little sister, she received her kiss and her thanks.

" Good, good Minnie ! " whispered the little

girl. "I'm so glad you've helped along Mabel! Mabel's getting so poor, Minnie! And I guess it's a dreadful, dreadful thing to be poor."

"It's to be hoped Clara won't take up this business of Minnie's saving her money for you, Mabel," said Hilda, when she came to learn what had occurred. "She'd make such a fuss, if she undertakes it, that Minnie'll never get another cent of pocket-money."

"Minnie seemed to be under no such apprehension," replied Mabel.

"She'd not hint it to you, if she was," rejoined Hilda. "But it would be just like Clara to do it, and it's nothing more than I expect."

By Wednesday the shirts were completed; and having taken them home and received the pay for them, Mabel went immediately to the learning of that vest-making which was to enable her better to meet the expenses of her little family.

It was a sore trial to poor Lilly to be left from early morning until evening by her loved sister; but she was sensible of the necessity for it, and submitted without a murmur. Hilda almost came out of herself, in her anxiety to fill creditably the place vacated by Mabel, showing a thoughtfulness

and tenderness for the little girl which quite surprised her older sister. Beside these attentions, she was able to take Mabel's place at the sewing-machine, employing herself on such work as the latter had recently been engaged on.

Little Lilly was now not unfrequently to be seen seated by the window in the big arm-chair, finding an inexhaustible fund of entertainment in watching the passers-by, and in talking to Hilda of the varying scene before her. Through September, the mid hours of the day were so warm that the window could sometimes be left open, the little girl delighting in the sunshine that streamed in upon her. Quite near to the house, within the little enclosure which Lilly called "the garden," stood a fine mountain-ash, which was the child's especial admiration. Resting forward upon the window-sill, — a position which appeared to bring her ease, — she could almost touch with her hand the great clusters of red berries on the tree; and when, swayed by a passing breeze, the boughs leant toward the house, the little fingers could actually pick a berry or two from the rich bunches.

Hopeful grew Mabel's heart as she marked the improvement in her little patient; and hope-

ful, too, grew that of Lilly herself. It was her delight to talk of the time which she believed was coming, — a time of renewed health and happiness. Surely she was going to get well! Surely those ugly pains, which had troubled her so much less than they had done, would, after a while, leave her entirely.

“I’ll be having a beautiful Maying with you, like last year, after all, Mabel!” she one evening said, “and plenty of nice walks into the country before that time comes, too!”

“I trust you will, my darling. May-day is a good way off; but whenever Lilly is well enough she shall have one of her old walks with her sister.”

“And when will I be well enough, Mabel dear? — next Sunday, do you think?”

“Scarcely so soon, my darling. Sunday is only four days off, you know.”

“Well, then, the Sunday after, — Mabel, say you think the Sunday after!”

“I say I hope so, my precious Lilly. It is all in God’s hands, darling; and as he wills it, so it will be.”

“I know it, Mabel; and I’m going to pray to

him every night to make me strong and well again. I did think maybe I was never, never going to be well again, Mabel; but now I feel so much better, and able to be up sometimes, it's put all those sad thoughts out of my head. Now, I think all the while of our dear old times coming back to us."

She caught her sister's eye resting sadly upon her as she said this, — sadly, because, though Lilly was certainly looking brighter than she had done for a long time, there was that in the little, wasted features which contradicted the hopes the child so confidently expressed. Mabel turned hastily away, with a word or two of encouragement to her little charge; but Lilly had not only caught the look, but read the misgivings it expressed.

"I've not forgotten, Mabel," she said, in a fainter tone, "that I'm to bear patiently what God chooses to bring me; and that I'm to pray for this patience, if the thing's hard to bear. Maybe," she added, with a sigh, "he wont think it for the best to make me well again. Maybe he wont let the dear old times come back! But hope is good for us, — didn't you say so the other day, Mabel? — so I'm going to hope all I can."

CHAPTER XI.

UNWELCOME NEWS.



NE evening Mabel was met on her return home with unlooked-for and unwelcome news. From Minnie, who was awaiting her, and Hilda together, she learned what neither alone appeared in condition to relate ; namely, that Mrs. Lemming, whose health had for some time been failing, was, in obedience to the directions of her physician, about to leave for a visit to Europe, and was planning to put her niece and Minnie at a school in New York, during her absence.

“Mrs. Lemming has been thinking of it for some time,” added Minnie to the hurried statement furnished by Hilda ; “but she never told me about it till to-day. She said I might come round and tell you and Hilda. She will leave here for New York next week, and means to take Clara and me along with her, that she may see

us comfortably entered at the school before she sails."

Mabel was taken too completely by surprise to be prepared with a reply. She could only look her grieved astonishment, as poor Minnie, out of breath through agitation and hurry together, brought her story to a conclusion.

"Oh, tell me one thing, Mabel," then said Minnie, — "*must I go?* Is there no way to get off of this being sent from you and dear little Lilly and Hilda? It doesn't seem to me I'm to go, Mabel. To think there will be no chance for me to see any of you again till Mrs. Lemming comes back, and that mayn't be for months, — for a year even! She's entering me and Clara for a whole year; for she read it so out of the letter she wrote to-day to the principal of the school. To think, Mabel, a whole year! Oh, how can I bear it? Tell me — tell me, Mabel, — must I go?"

She had knelt at Mabel's feet and put her arms about her. Mabel gently returned the embrace. She was looking very pale, but was now quite composed.

"You must go, my darling Minnie," she said.

"There is nothing for you to do,— nothing for us all to do, but to bend to the Will which is ordering these things. God's providence is arranging for us, and it is not for us to rebel. Were there a proper way for you to be spared this going, and for us to be spared the parting with you, I would turn to it. But there is none. Our dear mother left you to Mrs. Lemming, and Mrs. Lemming has acted kindly to you. She is acting kindly to you still, in providing for you a home during her absence, where the education she promised our dear mother for you will still be going on."

"She could leave me with you, Mabel," sobbed Minnie,—for tears had overtaken her now. "She could do that, as Hilda's been saying, and not let me be a burden to you, neither."

"Yes; she's rich and could do it," put in Hilda, warmly; "and it's what she ought to do. She could pay Minnie's board to you, Mabel, and leave money for her clothes; and then we'd all be together for a while, without loss to any one."

"Yes; but there would be a loss, Hilda,— a loss to Minnie of many months, perhaps, of school-

ing ; and improvement in her studies is an important thing to her. No one can justly find fault with what Mrs. Lemming is planning, my dear girls ; it is the best thing to be done under the circumstances, and we must strive to be content."

"The studies have nothing to do with Mrs. Lemming's calculations, I'll answer for it!" said Hilda. "What she's concerned about is leaving Minnie with her poor sewing-girl sisters. She's afraid all her trouble to make her a lady will be knocked over by vulgar examples set by her vulgar relations. Look how she's kept away from us herself, and how, but for poor Lilly's accident, she'd have been keeping Minnie from us all this time. I tell you, Mabel, Mrs. Lemming's just of a piece with cousin Algin, and the Barretts, and the rest of them ; and yet you can't see it! Haven't you been saying all along that Mrs. Barrett would do us some kindness, if we'd only give her time? And here it's two years nearly since we've been poor through her husband's means, and she's not so much as come to visit us. You're all the time thinking too well of people, Mabel ; and I think it's a shame! If I were you, I'd fly

right in the face of Mrs. Lemming, and take poor Minnie away from her. Let her go to Europe, if she likes, and send her precious, mischief-making Clara to the New York boarding-school; but Minnie belongs to *us*, and she has no right to be dragging her hundreds of miles from Chicago."

It is probable Hilda would have found a good deal of the same sort to say, only that, talking very fast, she was here, for want of breath, brought to a stand-still.

"It is not kind, Hilda, to talk in this way and make Minnie more unhappy," said Mabel, finding she could now put in a word. "Let us rather do what we can to content her with a change which is unavoidable. Get up, Minnie dear, and sit beside me in your old way. Let us believe all these things are for the best, and meet them in the spirit our dear mother taught us was the right one, — a reliance on Him who directs all our ways."

In this way, Mabel sought to reconcile her sisters to the separation which was before them, losing sight of her own distress in consideration of theirs.

Meanwhile, little Lilly was quite overlooked.

When, at length, Mabel went up to her, she found she had been silently weeping.

"I didn't want to cry, Mabel dear," she said, as the latter gently wiped the tears from her cheeks, "because I heard you say it was right and all for the best; but when I thought how happy it was for me that dear mother left me to *you*, and how poor Minnie was left to Mrs. Lemming, I pitied Minnie so much that I got started off when I didn't mean to."

The thought of how much less happy, in this particular, Minnie was than herself, here "started off" little Lilly again, and it was not without considerable trouble that Mabel succeeded in soothing her.

CHAPTER XII

THE BAD HEART.



THE day Mrs. Lemming had proposed to leave Chicago with her young charges came round, and so did the hour of parting between the sisters.

Poor Minnie made her appearance at Mabel's, looking pale and thin ; for she had been quite sick through the week which had passed since her conveying to her sisters tidings of the contemplated change.

" I've had such a disappointment ! " she said, as she hung weeping on Mabel's neck. " The only comfort I had in going is taken from me, Mabel."

" Your only comfort, my darling ? Try to find many, dear Minnie, — look for them, and you will have them. But what was this only comfort you speak of ? "

Minnie then explained that, learning from Mrs. Lemming she was to have a liberal supply of

pocket-money at command during her stay at the New York school, she had planned the sending of it in letters to Mabel ; but Clara had that morning informed her of arrangements made by Mrs. Lemming through which she would only receive this money from the hands of the principal of the school, on stating the purpose she had for it. Clara had not left her in doubt as to the reason for this arrangement, since she plainly told her Mrs. Lemming chose that the money should be spent by Minnie herself on "fancies," like the other girls, and not given away on any pretence whatever.

"O Mabel ! I feel this as you can't think !" said poor Minnie, in conclusion. "Hilda's been telling me how hard you find it to get along through your learning of the vest-making, even after selling your nice sofa and bureau ; and I thought how pleasant it would be, every once in a while, to send you some money, when you'd been put back so."

"Poor child ! I can understand your disappointment," replied Mabel. "But don't distress yourself. What is needful for us will come from some

quarter. God is not going to let us suffer, my sister."

"But I'm miserable to think, Mabel, that I'm having every comfort in life, while you and Hilda and dear little Lilly are wanting so many things. O Mabel! maybe you don't think it, but I'd rather have some wants and troubles, like the rest of you; then I'd not be reproaching myself as I do."

"Never reproach yourself, darling, for you are a kind, affectionate sister. And you have your troubles, too, Minnie,—your troubles and your wants, as you have just proved to us.

"I should think so!" indignantly put in Hilda. "I should say having a girl like that Clara Dean prying around and interfering with one's concerns was just about trouble enough for any one! This is all her contriving, Mabel; and I told you how it would be when Minnie gave you that ten dollars. Mrs. Lemming would never have made such strict arrangements but for her interfering. Tell the truth now, Minnie,—isn't Clara at the bottom of it all?"

"Mrs. Lemming is kind and good," replied Minnie; "and I don't think, of her own accord,

she'd keep me from doing what I please with the money."

"Of course not," chimed in Hilda. "But she's driven and followed up by Clara, till she's got to do just as she likes. I hate that girl! I just hate her!"

"Hate no one, my sister," reproved Mabel. "Remember the lessons taught us by dear mother."

"I'm sure you can't expect me to love her," petulantly returned Hilda. "I'm sure no one could be better for loving such a girl as Clara Dean."

"Not for loving her ugly ways, certainly, Hilda; but for trying to love and pity the poor girl herself. Surely, she is to be pitied for being so unhappy."

"Unhappy, Mabel, with every comfort and indulgence around her?"

"Unhappy, because she has a bad heart, Hilda. There is no surer source of unhappiness than a bad heart."

"Poverty's worse!" returned Hilda, who was evidently in one of her less amiable moods. "Poverty's the hardest, bitterest, most crushing unhappiness one can know!"

The sisters stood beside Lilly's bed ; Mabel with one arm around Minnie. She now put the other about Hilda.

"We all love each other," she said ; "and there are no bad hearts among us. Oh ! be sure, Hilda, there is more to be thankful for in this, than in the wealth of the world without it."

There is no need to linger over the sad parting which soon followed on this little conversation. It came and passed, leaving each heart oppressed with the thought of the many months likely to intervene before a meeting should take place.

The term of Mabel's apprenticeship to vest-making expired a few days after the leaving of Minnie, and she again resumed her home-labors, having gotten a tolerably good supply of vests to work upon. For Hilda, she had lost her place at the store where she had worked by remaining at home to take care of Lilly. Not more effectually was it lost to her through her three weeks' absence, however, than it would have been had she remained away but a day, the man who employed her not permitting his sewing-hands so much as this short absence from his working-rooms.

It now became necessary for Hilda to find a new place, as Mabel's occupation of the sewing-machine did not permit her to continue home-work. Mabel agreed that it would be well for her to spend a little time in seeking work that would compensate her somewhat better than that she had previously had ; and thus a day or two were lost to her.

Upon the afternoon of the second day that had been thus fruitlessly spent, Hilda returned home yet more weary and dispirited than upon the first.

"To-morrow finds me a place at any mean price!" she exclaimed, impatiently throwing off her hat, as she seated herself beside Mabel. "O Mabel, Mabel! since sewing is a *business*, surely it ought to be possible to *live* by it!"

"Some do," replied Mabel; "but they are the few,—those so fortunate as to secure such a place as I once had,—*the many* must nerve themselves for a hard struggle and a long one."

"And we are of the 'many,' Mabel. Oh, if I only had your patience for this hard and long struggle! for it is coming, Mabel,—it is on us now. I was calculating closely after I went to bed

last night, and, even with your vest-making and my getting as much as fifty cents a day, — as *much* as fifty cents ! Think of it, Mabel ! — fifty cents for ten hours close and steady work ! and a poor girl glad to get it ! Well, even with this fifty cents added to what you make, we shall have a hard, hard time to get along this winter, — if we *do* get along.”

“ We shall get along, my sister, never fear.”

“ Think of the coal and the rent, Mabel ! ”

“ I do. As concerns the rent, there must be a change made. I was speaking to Mrs. Powers this morning about our rooms, proposing from next week, when our month is up, to retake one only. We cannot afford two rooms, Hilda ; and I should not have kept them so long, only on account of Lilly. The doctor attaches so much importance to a good ventilation and to no over-heating. But the season is now coming when a fire will need to be kept all the time ; therefore it will make less difference to have the cooking and washing going on in the room with Lilly.”

“ And which room will you keep, Mabel ? ”

“ Neither, my dear. Mrs. Powers objects to renting one without the other. She has always rented

them best together. We will have to look elsewhere. While you are out for work to-morrow you will make inquiry for a room that will suit us, and I can then go and engage it."

"I tell you I shall have a search for it! Why, there's the greatest trouble to find a place of any sort in Chicago now, Mabel; I'm hearing about it all the time. I don't believe that even in such a place as Polk street you'll get a room for half what you pay for one of these."

"Perhaps not, Hilda; but you know we cannot keep one of these. Do your best, my sister. We have still nearly a week in which to make the change."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLD BOOTS.



HILDA'S search of the next day did not result in her procuring a room, or a place for work ; but she was more fortunate upon the morning following, having discovered a room in a small house on Polk street, from which the tenants were going to move out in a few days. It is true this family informed her that the cause of their leaving was the raising of the rent, — the landlord now demanding seven dollars a month, in place of the five and a half which had previously contented him. But the difficulty of finding a room was great ; and time to Hilda was now important, as she had engaged to enter upon a new sewing-place upon the following day. Upon her reporting concerning this room to Mabel, therefore, the latter concluded to go the next morning, when she would be out carrying home some vests, and, if possible, engage it.

That afternoon she noticed Hilda busying herself in a corner about something she seemed desirous to keep to herself.

"What are you doing, Hilda?" she inquired at length.

"Mending my boots," was the reply; "or, I mean, trying to mend them. They've been letting in the water for some time, and this morning a stone got in and almost lamed me."

"Let me look at them," rejoined Mabel, who was engaged with her sewing-machine.

"No; for I don't want you to be bothering over them, and I know that will be the next thing. I want to be a little more self-reliant, Mabel. You have enough to do without mending my old shoes."

"I didn't propose to mend them, only to look at them. Perhaps I can show you a better way to manage them."

Hilda limped across the room, the boots in her hand, and silently placed one of them before her sister. Mabel lifted and gravely examined it.

"Poor child! I did not think they were so far gone," she said. "I see you have cobbled them

up before; but they are almost past mending, now."

"I think I can put a piece of that old slipper into the largest hole," replied Hilda. "See, I have almost done this one."

"Not badly done, Hilda; but still, it will scarcely stand your walk to-morrow to the store. You will have to have a new pair, my sister."

"And where are they to come from? O Mabel! if you only knew how I have watched and watched the wearing of those shoes, and how I've hoped and hoped again that something would turn up to enable me to get another pair at my *own cost*! What a miserable, ill-contrived girl I am, that I can't earn even my bread and a pair of boots, after three months' work, and more!"

"At three shillings a day, how could you?" said Mabel, soothingly. "But cheer up, Hilda. You have a place now, and you can take your first earnings to buy a pair of good, new boots."

"And take bread out of your mouth and dear little Lilly's to do it! O Mabel! I've been a simpleton and a wicked, wicked girl! I ought to have stayed at cousin Algin's. You were right, as you always are, — I ought to have stayed. If she'd

put her foot on my neck, even, I ought to have stayed. But she didn't, — she was decent enough in her way, and she believed she was giving me a decent enough time, too. She kept me in good clothes and good food, and I only didn't know how good they were. If I hadn't come from her with things almost new, and with boots just out of the store, I'd have been in rags and barefoot now. And I don't know how I'm to keep from being barefoot and in rags, Mabel, — oh, I don't know ! — I don't know ! It's coming on me fast, — fast ! But I suppose I've got to bear it, like many a better girl before me."

As she finished speaking, Hilda bent her head over her old boot, and burst into a passion of tears.

"This is not the way to be self-reliant, Hilda dear," said Mabel, gently. "Finish your boot, and put it by for out-door wear. You can always have my slippers for the house, and that will save them until you can get others."

While saying this, Mabel was quietly progressing in the cobbling of the boot Hilda had left with her ; and before the latter, having checked her tears, had gotten well under way at the finishing of the one she had been busy about, her sister had

the other completed, in as good a way as circumstances permitted.

“ Oh, you have done it! — and how nicely!” Hilda exclaimed, as, having at length finished the mate, she took up the other from beside Mabel.

“ If I could only be like you, Mabel! — only so smart and capable, and so able to do everything well! Why was I made such a clumsy bungler at everything I take up?”

“ We have all our ‘gifts,’ dear Hilda, — all something to be thankful for. Gratitude for these is not only due our Creator, but makes our own happiness.”

“ Tell me of one thing *I* have to be thankful for, just at this time, Mabel,” said Hilda, after a pause. “ Something, I mean, beside a kind, good sister to advise and help me. I know I have that.”

“ To begin with, Hilda, you have health, which is a very great blessing in itself. Compare your condition with that of our suffering little Lilly, — with that of many a poor, sickly girl, who, like yourself, has to work for a living. Have you forgotten those two consumptive sisters you were telling me of the other day, who sew for Stean, and

that go with scant clothes and almost shoeless feet through cold and damp ? ”

“ O Mabel ! I *had* forgotten them ; and I *do* thank God that he hasn't made me like them. Poor girls ! I believe if they had decent comforts they'd be nearly as well as others ; but, with all they have to go through, it's no wonder they're what they are. They boil over their tea-leaves a second time to drink, and take it without sugar or milk ; and all they have to eat with it is a crust of bread, and that, maybe, dry and stale. Their mother's a cripple, and can do nothing ; and they have to support her, as well as themselves, on the little pay they get for their sewing. If you were but to see those poor girls, Mabel, you'd think, like me, that it would be no strange thing if they were, one day, to fall dead over their work. And if they did, what would it matter, except to the old mother, who would be left to starve ? Stean would have two other girls in their places before an hour was over, — two others to grind down, as he has poor Fanny and her sister. I tell you, Mabel, this sewing business seems very like some of the dreadful things we read of from the war. The sewing-girls are poor creatures fighting

for the morsel to eat and the rag to wear ; and when their health and strength are gone, or their hopes died out, why, one after another, they fall, and are trodden under foot ; others — oh, yes ! plenty of others crowding on to fill up the ranks, greedy to get even the little pittance such men as this Stean give, because it's *something*. And so is a dime *something*, though it's to buy bread and clothes, and pay for coal and house-rent."

" My dear Hilda, how you excite yourself ! "

" Is it any wonder, Mabel ? " Hilda asked this in a tone so low as to form a strange contrast to the one in which she had just spoken. " Isn't it for this very Stean I go to work to-morrow ? "

" My dear sister, it is. But don't be discouraged because of that. You are young and in strength ; and neither are you alone, but with a sister beside you, who will do all God gives her to do to lighten your burden."

" Mabel, it discourages me more than you can think to have to work for this man Stean. I tried so hard to avoid it, as you know. But what could I do ? Any place where better pay is given, — if ever such a trifle better, — is caught up by others who have more experience than I ; and so I'm re-

duced to the condition of that crowd pressing on to fill up the ranks, — the poor girls willing to catch at *anything* that may be called *something*.”

“ But this little something is not the all we have to depend on, Hilda ; and for that let us be thankful. With little Lilly so much better as she is now, and the more time I shall have to work at the vests, I don’t fear but we shall do well.”

“ Still, Mabel, it doesn’t change the fact that *I* shall be bringing a mere mite to help along.”

“ Nor does your bringing what you call a mere mite change the fact that you will be doing your best, dear Hilda. It is not your fault that you can bring no more, but the fault of those, who, taking advantage of the necessities of poor sewing-women, make such unsuitable return for their labor.”

“ Mabel, are there not many things in the Bible which seem to touch directly at the employers of poor sewing-girls ? ”

“ There certainly are. Very many are the warnings against that greed of gain, which induces this one class of people to be so cruel to another ; and oppression of the poor is spoken of as a sin particularly hateful in the sight of God.”

“A dreadful score will there be against such men as Stean and Lelleman, then.”

“Dreadful indeed. For we cannot but believe that God, in his justice, will deal with them in that spirit of retribution he has promised.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HOUSE AGENT.



HE next morning, having taken home her vests, Mabel sought the proprietor of the house, in which she proposed taking a room.

He was a house agent, by the name of Brumbley, doing business in a little box of an office on — street. He was in his office when Mabel entered it, and received her with the disagreeable gruffness of manner, of which his appearance gave promise. So discouraged, indeed, was poor Mabel by the address of this man, that, had there been time and opportunity to find a room other than the one she had come about, she would have been tempted to retire from his office almost upon the moment of entering it.

In return to the question put to him by Mabel concerning the terms, per month, of the room, he

inquired what business she followed. Mabel replied that she sewed for a living.

"Just the sort of tenant I don't want," he growled, giving her an ugly look from under his shaggy brows. "Sewing-women are the most troublesome sort of folks to deal with. They're always poor as rats, and whining like whipped curs. They get behindhand with their rent, and expect house-owners to have hearts soft as mush, and heads a good deal softer. *I*, for one, haven't a head or heart of that sort, and I give no quarter, right or left."

"I have always been able to pay my rent punctually," said Mabel, "and hope to do so still."

"Humph! That may be; but, I'll be bound, some confounded thing will turn up after you get into *my* house to give me trouble. How many in family?"

"Myself and two sisters, — one grown, the other a sick child."

"That's small enough for a family; but I see trouble through the sick child. A sick child, or sick mother or grandmother's forever being thrown in one's face as excuse for backward rent. *I* have no consideration for these things, and will as lief

turn into the street a sick child, mother, or grandmother, as a young woman in good health."

"I hope to have no trouble, sir," Mabel rejoined. "As yet, — thanks be to God! — I never have had."

The man gave her a sharp and lengthened look. It was evident that the expression of goodness on the countenance of Mabel was not without its effect even upon this crabbed piece of humanity, for he followed up the look by stating the price of the room.

"Seven dollars a month, did you say?" repeated Mabel. "I thought it might be less than that."

"It's neither more nor less," replied the man, with an aggravation of his gruffness. "I suppose you thought to get it a dead bargain, because those people who are leaving it got it at a dirt-cheap price. But I'm going to have no more of such work as that. The person who owns that house is one that looks sharp to every dime, and aint going to let folks live on her property on terms that might be called rent-free, at a time when every hole in Chicago brings its price. Let that room slip through your fingers, and, unless you have more time to throw away than sewing-girls

generally have, you'll be apt to find yourself with no room at all."

Mabel saw there was only too much truth in these words, and, for a time, stood irresolute. The rent was higher than she thought safe to take upon herself, and she had come in strong hope of getting the room on terms better suited to her. Prudence suggested that the wiser course would be to make an attempt to find a place better suited to her means, even if the effort necessitated some loss of time; and she acquainted Mr. Brumbley with her resolve.

"Ninety-nine to a hundred but you find that room rented by the time you come back, — for back you *will* come," was the reply. "Rooms of that sort don't wait, in these times, for people to make up their minds."

Mabel commenced her search, confining herself to such neighborhoods as Hilda had not already looked through. No success, however, attended her efforts; and, in some anxiety, she returned, after the lapse of several hours, to close with the offer made her by Mr. Brumbley, were it still open to her.

"You're just in time," he said. "A man's gone round to look at that room this minute. Well, so

you take it? Rent to be paid in advance, — to be brought here to me punctually, to the day. If it don't come to *me*, I come after *it*. And remember, there's no use to throw the sick child in my face. I've gone through those dodges, — they're played out. When do you move in?"

"On Tuesday morning."

"Pay the seven dollars now."

Mabel had not the money with her, and told him so, saying she would return with it in the afternoon.

"If you don't, you'll lose the room," was the rejoinder; — "maybe you'll lose it anyhow."

Mabel feared this so much that she hurried home for the money, and returned with it without loss of a minute.

The man took the seven dollars in silence, and gave a receipt for it.

"Mind you be punctual to the day," he then said, scowling on her in a threatening way. "Some may be imposed on, but *I* can't be. If you know what you're about, you won't try it. And one thing more, — the first thing and the last thing, — don't throw the sick child at me, — mind you! — don't throw the sick child at me."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MOUNTAIN ASH.

eldom had Mabel been discouraged as upon this day. The having burdened herself with a rent large for her means was depressing in itself, and was rendered yet more so by knowledge that the change about to be made must narrow in every way their comfort and convenience.

How different a prospect from that of their present snug rooms on Jackson street was presented by this room in the Polk street house, with its crowded neighborhood and neglected surroundings filled with ponds of stagnant water and vagrant poultry! Gravely she thought on the possible effect the unfavorable change might have upon the condition of her little Lilly; for she knew from her own observation, as well as from information of her physician, that the child was peculiarly under influence of cheerful sights and sounds and

a pure atmosphere. But in face of all this, that stern taskmaster, *necessity*, was against the loving sister, and there was nothing for her but to submit.

The mere fact of the change was a novelty that, in contemplation alone, quite aroused the little Lilly; and she plied her sisters with questions relative to their new home.

"Will there be a pretty mountain-ash in the garden?" she asked; "and will the garden be right under the window, like it is here?"

"There is neither garden nor pretty mountain-ash, my darling," replied Mabel, clasping to her heart the little hands, eagerly put forth with the question. "But sister will buy you a sweet-smelling mignonette, instead; and, after a while, a pretty geranium, too, with bright red flowers, like the one in the garden."

But a look of grief stole over the little pallid features, and, during the short silence that followed, and while she pressed her head against Mabel's shoulder, two big tears rolled from under Lilly's eyelids and coursed down her cheeks.

"Wont it be something to have the pretty mignonette, dear Lilly?" Mabel asked, in as cheer-

ful a tone as she could assume ; “ and to think by and by of the bright red geranium beside it ? ”

“ Yes, dear Mabel,” almost sobbed the child ; “ but still I’ll so miss the garden at times I can sit up to the window, and the mountain-ash that I can all but touch with my hand ! O Mabel, Mabel ! the pretty red berries ! — I shall so miss the pretty red berries ! ”

Mabel thought how few sources of pleasure were now open to the little sufferer, and reproached herself that she, even so unwillingly, narrowed these to her.

“ You will still have Hilda and Mabel, Lilly dear,” she said ; “ and you know the other day, after sitting up at the window, you said, after all, lying down with Mabel to hold your hand was nice as being up and looking into the garden.”

“ Because I’d been up so long then, and my back pained me till I got to bed again ; for oftentimes on Sundays you sit by me at the window and hold my hand, and that’s better than all.”

Lilly said this still struggling with her tears ; but at the last words she caught a view of Mabel’s face, and the grief she read there recalled her to other feelings.

"But never mind, Mabel dear," she hastened to add; "I'll cheer up and make the best of it, as you often tell me to do. And wont you ask Mrs. Powers to let us take away a big bunch of her mountain-ash? and then we'll put it in water on the mantle or somewhere, and see the pretty red berries long as we can."

"I will, my darling, and I know she'll let us. And so we'll have a little tree of our own, and one that Lilly can see while she's in bed as well as when she's sitting up to the window."

"Yes, yes, Mabel! I never thought of that. I can see it all the time, and that will be nice, though it is but a little tree and not growing in the garden."

Tuesday came round, and the move was made. Mabel retained only so much of her furniture as was actually needed in the more confined boundary of their new home, disposing of the remainder to Mrs. Powers. All they took with them was neatly arranged as circumstances permitted. The room was somewhat larger than either of those they left; still, with its two beds, stove, little cupboard, sewing-machine, table, and chairs, it had a crowded

appearance, and one not calculated to impress cheerfully the new occupants.

Little Lilly was conveyed to her new home on her bed, placed in the express-wagon ; and, as it was a pleasant, sunshiny day, the novelty of being out of doors and the ride together had the effect of putting the little girl in unusually good spirits. By the window Mabel had placed the invalid's big arm-chair ; and on the window-sill the driver of the wagon nailed a board, to give room for the standing of the mignonette-pot which Mabel had that morning purchased. The plant looked cheerful there in the sunshine, and so did the great bough of Lilly's favorite tree, which Mrs. Powers had herself cut off and placed in a large broken vase of her own.

The mignonette and the mountain-ash had travelled in the express-wagon with Lilly herself, and so close to her that she could at any time touch them by putting out her hand.

The expressman was a boarder of Mrs. Powers, and had frequently seen Lilly in her better times from her seat at the window, and pitied her little white face with its look of patient suffering. Tenderly as a man handles his own feeble infant did he

carry in his strong arms the little bed with its light occupant, to and from its place in the wagon ; and, when he put it down in its new resting-place, it was with tears in his honest eyes that he said, —

“ God help you, little one ! It takes a brave heart to bear what he has put on you.”

He refused to take the dollar Mabel offered him.

“ Keep it yourself,” he said. “ Every dollar’s much to a girl that’s got one like her ” — pointing to Lilly, — “ to look to.”

“ You have honestly earned it,” said Mabel, still proffering him the money ; “ and perhaps are not rich enough yourself to afford to be so generous.”

“ I’d feel poor enough, if I took it,” rejoined the man, turning away. “ I’m a good bit more than a dollar *richer without it.*”

For a moment or two after he had left, Mabel stood silently, with the dollar in her hand. It was little Lilly’s voice that broke the quiet.

“ It was a good angel gave you the dollar, Mabel,” she said.

“ It was, my darling,” was the reply ; “ and sent of God, as you know all good angels are.”

“ Yes, Mabel. Hilda was talking the other day

about dreading the time you'd come to your *last dollar*. That time's further off now, — isn't it? — further off, by a good bit, maybe."

"Just so far off as God wills it, my darling. He best knows how it should be."

CHAPTER XVI.

DIED AT HER POST



ILDA had now taken her place in the sewing-room of her new employer.

The thirty-five or forty cents a day, which was promised herself, was all that was paid to those among whom she labored; and it was not long before she discovered that a general dissatisfaction prevailed regarding the wages paid.

“Such a pittance don’t keep body and soul together,” said to Hilda an intelligent, bright-eyed girl of about twenty, who appeared to be a leading spirit among the little company. “I’d like Stean himself to be portioned out by it, for a month or two. Perhaps it might open his crabbed Jew heart a little. It would be a good thing if he could be made to go to work, with pen and paper, and figure out how a poor girl is to live on it. Let him put down, in black and white, the cost of

lodging and of board, with clothes and fuel, and bring the amount anywhere near the money that can be made by working for him. Look, too, what it costs us in shoes, if we trot back and forth to his store ; or what car pay comes to, if we live so far off we can't walk. I keep a strict account of all I get and all I spend, and I know exactly what a girl can do on Stean's pay. I know that one pair of good boots will last me just eight weeks ; and I'm not so hard on my shoes as many another. So there's over two shillings a week for boots alone, at present prices ; and that's only one out of many things to be settled for. I tell you, Hilda Ross, I look with pity on every girl that gets into the clutches of this Stean. I've seen more girls get broken down and ruined at his work than at any other's, and I worked three years before I came to him, and have only been with him thirteen months."

"I've only worked for Lellerman before," said Hilda, "and I thought him bad enough ; but this Stean is worse."

"I've heard plenty of Lellerman, too," was the reply. "I've heard plenty of them all. I know them, out and out."

“But why is it the sewing-girls can’t *make* these men do better by them?” asked Hilda. “Suppose they were to refuse to work but for better wages, — wouldn’t that settle it?”

“Yes, but for the crowds of women and girls wanting work so badly that they’ll take it at any price. If all would act together, and could afford to starve till their employers were forced into decent terms, it would work well enough. But, unfortunately, we all have to eat and drink, and must have a place to lay our heads in; so there’s no forcing them into a mend.”

“There’ll be a mighty day of reckoning for these men!” exclaimed Hilda, a sudden fire in her eye. “If all the evil they’re the cause of is put down against them, — and why wont it be? — isn’t God looking on? — why, where will they stand? Tell me that now, — where will they stand?”

Hilda’s companion regarded her with surprise.

“You’re a regular little go-ahead one,” she said, “and have eyes and ears for everything. I like that. I wish more of the girls were so, instead of being the easy, weak sort they are. They sit crying over their work, day and night, taking every-

thing as it comes, as if there was nothing for them to do *but* to take it."

"Poor things! Because they've been at it so long that their hearts and souls are crushed out of them."

"Do you believe all the heart and soul could be crushed out of you or me?" asked her companion. "I tell you *no*! O Hilda Ross! what a thing it would be, if there were an army of women and girls like you and me in Chicago! Something might be done then, — something *would* be done. And let me tell you, if anything ever *is* done for the poor sewing-women of this town, it's the sewing-women themselves will have to do it. And maybe this something *will* be done," she added, looking curiously at Hilda. "Maybe, even the poor, sickly, crushed set we have at Stean's will get their courage up to trying for it. It will be a little matter, to be sure, — a little matter to succeed or fail in, many would say; but it may be the first stone rolled that brings down a mountain. Some have said not to speak to you about it, because you are a new hand; but I know you may be trusted, and that you're of the sort we want."

She then went on to explain that there was a

"strike" actually in contemplation, and that this was something entirely new in the course of sewing-women and in the experience of their employers.

"Say nothing about it," she said in conclusion. "If Stean gets to know of it before it's actually commenced, he has the whip-hand of us. The greater surprise it comes to him, the better."

"Suppose it's altogether a surprise, do you expect much from it?" asked Hilda, whose interest was aroused by the relation.

"It's impossible to tell what may come of it," was the reply. "Stean's a man without a soul; but then, like all such men, he's a rank coward at heart, and may be willing to come to reason rather than have the whole thing brought against him. For, however it appears that we poor sewing-girls are overlooked with our troubles by the community, there is, every once in a while, an interest excited for us, and even some talk of doing something to better our condition. God knows it needs bettering! Of course you've heard of the affair of Peggy Bonner and Roxy Billings?"

"No. What was it?"

"I thought Harriet Prince might have told you,

as she was intimate with poor Peggy and Roxy. I ought to have begun by telling you about them ; for the truth of it is, it's the very thing that's roused the girls to the point of this strike.

“ Roxy and Peggy were cousins, and lived like sisters together. They rented a little room on the lower end of Lincoln street, and boarded themselves. They could only live by a regular scratching through, like the rest of us, and Roxy, who was a delicate girl, soon began to sink under it. They had never worked so hard till they came to Stean's ; because Peggy had had a mother living, with a life interest in quite a nice little property, and this mother had brought up Roxy, who was a sister's child, like her own, and they all lived comfortably together, the girls doing the work of the house. Fortunately they had a good sewing-machine ; and when Mrs. Bonner died, and some one else came in for the money they had all lived on, they began to work at sewing for a living. Then they came to Stean's to work.

“ As I was telling you, Roxy was delicate ; and after a while she got into such poor health that she had sometimes to stay at home for a day, or maybe two or three days together. She couldn't sit to

her sewing-machine, you see, she was so weak. By and by she got so much worse that Peggy had to stay home sometimes with her. Then Stean threatened to dismiss Peggy, making out he didn't believe she was nursing her cousin, but taking holidays for amusement. Amusement indeed! I'd like to know where she'd have found heart or money for amusement, so near ruin and starvation! At last, after a great deal of threatening and trouble, Stean *generously* consented, as the poor girls had been working for him for nearly two years, — and didn't they deserve something for standing by him that long at his prices? — he consented, I say, that Peggy should work for him at home, but brought down the price from that he paid at the store to two-thirds only. How these two poor girls had supported themselves long as they had is a mystery to those that put two and two together, and that know that bread doesn't come, like manna, from the clouds, and shoes and calico dresses don't grow on trees. Maybe they were helped by some of those who claim a price to be paid in another world as well as this. They were open to suspicion, since they *did* live, and were not yet reduced to their last rag; so some whispered it of them. But, if it

were so, was the fault *all* theirs ? Hilda Ross, was it ? I've put that question to myself again and again, and, from my heart, lighted by the best knowledge I have of right and wrong, there has come this answer : The deadliest weight of the sin is on those who drove them to it. If a poor beast is driven into water and kept there, is it his fault if he drowns ? Then how is it with these poor girls ?

“ I tell you, Hilda Ross, starvation, cold, and rags are hard things to face, even when in the distance ; harder still to bear when they are upon you ; and when there are those at hand who tend the aid which is ruin, poor human nature has to be hedged in with a good deal of the angel to stand it. See, *I* have decent clothes, and so have I a decent home and enough in reason to eat and drink. But how have I these ? Why, because I have two good brothers who let me spend what I make on my clothes, or as I choose, not taking board of me, though I have no time, with my sewing, to keep house for them. But does that make Stean's prices better ? Does it make it easier for others to live on them ? ”

"Indeed it doesn't," replied Hilda. "But you haven't finished about Peggy and Roxy."

"Well, the finishing is near at hand. These poor girls went on long as they could, suffering and suffering, without complaint, too,—for they were of the spiritless, patient sort we were speaking of,—till one day a person in the house remarking that she hadn't seen them about since the day before, went to their room, and there found both the poor things—dead."

"Dead!" repeated Hilda, her cheeks and lips quite pale.

"Yes, dead of cold and neglect,—the one stiffened upon her bed, the other at her sewing-machine! Probably Roxy died first, and without her cousin knowing what had happened; but it was plain poor Peggy had been trying to get through her night work,—for she often sewed night as well as day,—to earn her pittance for the morrow. It was an intensely cold spell, and she had used up her coal,—the last was found in the little stove, burned to ashes,—and working in that bitter cold was more than life could stand.

"It was said there was an aid society going to do something for them, or talking about doing

something for them, and that it was the work promised by these ladies poor Peggy was looking for from day to day ; but I don't know. Anyhow nothing *was* done for them, and that cold night ended all their troubles.

“ There should be another great Hood to write a story about that girl, Hilda, and it should be called, ‘ Dying on her post ! ’ For wasn't it so ? Just as the oil of her sewing-machine was frozen, so was the blood in her veins still and dead. I have heard and known of strange and sad things about sewing-girls, but never anything so sad and terrible as this of Peggy and Roxy. There was trouble taken to keep it out of the papers, and it *was* kept out ; but it got to be known to a good many besides Stean's people, for all that.”

“ When did it happen ? ” questioned Hilda, in a whisper.

“ Late last February. It made a great stir at Stean's, with all his trying to keep it down, and this business of the strike has been working ever since. It ought to have come right upon it ; but there are always slow-coaches on these things ! I believe if the strike had come at the right time it would have made its mark for every sewing-woman

in Chicago ; but better late than never. Our little affair may come to something, last as well as first."

By the time Debby Curtis had finished her relation, she and Hilda found themselves at the home of the latter ; for it was during their walk from their place of work that the relation was made. They parted almost in silence, Hilda so much impressed by the melancholy story of poor Peggy and Roxy that she could think or speak of nothing else during the remainder of the evening.

The whole of it was repeated to Mabel, with exception of the contemplated "strike," which was the result. This, for private reasons, she determined to keep to herself.

The story of Peggy and Roxy haunted Hilda's sleeping as well as waking thoughts. She dreamed she was present in the room of the poor girls on that night of terrible cold, though in a condition that left her no power of motion, or even ability to make a cry. She knew what was happening, — knew what was about to happen, yet was without power to assist in any way the unfortunate cousins. Still, with a sort of fascination which was terrible to her, the scene before her engaged all her atten-

tion ; and particularly was her interest fixed upon the poor girl who was about to be overtaken by death while busy at the instrument which had been her means of livelihood.

To the dreamer's fancy, it seemed that the sewing-machine was a thing of life, like poor Peggy herself, and that it struggled like her for the vital spark which was departing from it. "The oil of the machine was frozen, like the blood in her veins, both cold and stiff," Debby Curtis had said. To Hilda's fancy it was all blood, — springing, running, deep-red blood, contending with the icy chills which were stealing around it. She was agonizingly conscious of the whole scene, though at the same time quite insensible to any personal inconvenience from the cold. She heard the whir and click of the machine and saw the busy wheels run and the treadle rock ; she saw the hands of the toiler, too, plying busily her work, — striving, it seemed, by rapid motion to fight off the enemy that had marked her for his own.

The fire got lower, the room chillier, the hands stayed and bungled over their work, the running-gear of the machine became clogged. Then an icy, icy coldness filled the room, — it fell everywhere, —

it turned to icicles the breath of the work-woman. A stone-like stillness crept over her, — the sound and motion of the machine were over, — life had departed from both. Peggy had died at her post.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE "STRIKE."



It was a day or two later, and the sewing-women and girls in Stean's employ were collected at the place of their labors.

All had come punctually to the hour, not a few in advance of it. A different appearance from the usual one might have been observed about each and all of these poor women to-day ; for once the look of stolid indifference, — that outward sign of crushed hopes and exhausted energies common with most of them, — had given place to a something like expression of feeling. Some countenances wore a look of determination and strength, others of anxiety and weakness, — even of fear. Some eyes flashed brightly and hopefully, others drooped despondingly, a few even tearfully.

No bonnets or hats were taken off ; none divested themselves of the outside covering they wore ; but,

leaving untouched the machines, which were generally the first objects of interest, they gathered together in a group, conversing in low tones, and apparently awaiting the coming of some one; for many were the glances cast in direction of the inner door.

The some one came at last. It was the foreman; a person considerably younger than Stean himself, but one, in his own way, not less unprepossessing in appearance.

The moment he appeared Debby walked up to him.

"Mr. Levi," she said, "we shall work no longer for Mr. Stean at his present wages. The winter is coming on and the price of everything rising with every day; and, unless Mr. Stean allows us better wages,—something we can *live by*,—every woman and girl employed in this room will leave at once, and never come back to him."

Mr. Levi stared at her, then ran his eye over the group standing, all attention, a little way off. His countenance expressed slight surprise, nothing more.

"He will find plenty of others to come," he then said, bringing up once more with his eyes upon Debby; "you know that, Debby Curtis."

"Plenty may come and plenty may go, too," rejoined Debby, with concentrated feeling, "and his busy time may be ruined by it. I'll engage he'll find no others to stay as we have done. Some of these," glancing round at her companions, "have been working for him these two years. I myself have been taking his niggardly pay for nearly fourteen months; and Peggy Bonner and Roxy Billings would have been with him two years and four months *this day*, if he—if he hadn't *frozen them up!* None of the rest of us want to be frozen to death by him, nor to die in any other way by his hands. We want to *live*, and to live by our work. While we spend every minute of ten hours a day for him, he *owes* us a living and has got to give it to us. All we want with *you* is to tell him so, and to tell it just as you heard it."

"Certainly I will tell him," was the reply, in the same unimpassioned tone as before. "It is not very difficult to do that;" and the undemonstrative foreman quietly left the room.

For a moment after his departure, not a word was spoken by the women. Then Debby suddenly broke the silence to say,—

"Margaret Cline, move back. I can stand alone at this work."

Now Margaret Cline was the woman who had volunteered to stand second to Debby, and for whose reappearance at her place of labor the "strike" had, for some time, been postponed.

"What's the trouble?" she asked, in a voice that she vainly strove to steady. "Aint I ready to do all I promised?"

"No, for you can't do it," rejoined Debby. "Poor girl! this sitting up with your mother's been too much for you! you're sick yourself to-day."

Margaret put her hands over her eyes, and silently wept. Debby Curtis was right: she was sick, not only sick but *hungry*; for the time lost through nursing her mother had given opportunity for starvation to enter the house. She had no heart for the "strike," to-day.

"I haven't been nursing, or sitting up with any one," said Hilda, pushing forward to Debby's side; "and just what I'd like is to stand by you Debby Curtis. Shall I?"

Debby's only reply was to press the hand which Hilda, while speaking, had slipped into her

own; for, at that moment, Stean himself appeared in the room, followed by his passive foreman.

Approaching the two girls, Debby and Hilda, who stood somewhat in advance of the others, he said, —

"Vat is dis my foreman tells me, Debby Curtis? You ask for higher vages?"

With great self-command Debby repeated what she had said to the foreman, and, nearly as possible, in the same words. If the allusion to the melancholy fate of Peggy and Roxy touched the man, in any way, he gave no intimation of it, but passed it over in silence.

"I do business for twelve year in Chicago," he said, with an ugly scowl, "and dis de first time a ting like dis' happen; and it is for me to make von example of it. I know right vell how it start, — I know dat it ish von — two — maybe tree girl, vat ish dissatisfy, and dey vork up de rest to help on de trouble. But it vill do no good, but only harm. My price is fair price, and plenty vill vork for it; neder vill I chose to have any vork for me but vat ish satisfy."

“Satisfied!” exclaimed Hilda, her temper rising upon this cool retort of her employer. “Where will you find a girl satisfied with wages not fit for a dog! Were poor Peggy and Roxy *satisfied*?—did the miserable way those poor girls died speak up for your *fair prices*?” Then suddenly getting her temper again under command, in a changed tone she added, “Mr. Stean, we ask for justice and fairness—nothing more. We are sewing-women, and sewing-women are expected to live by their work. Now, we have one and all found we can *not* live on what you pay us,—so beg you to do better by us. That you may be quite satisfied of the truth of what we say, we have made up a list of a poor girl’s necessary expenses,—absolutely necessary ones only, you understand,—and have brought it to you, signed by *all* these girls and women present. If you would only look at it, you would see how far it goes beyond the weekly wages you pay us.”

As she concluded these words, Hilda took a paper from the hand of Debby, and offered it to their employer.

Surprise only had so long kept the man si-

lent, — surprise at the prompt and determined address of a girl who was not only the youngest present, but so much of a stranger in his employ.

But his anger, if for a while held back, was not the less positive when it asserted itself.

"I not look at it," he cried, impatiently waving aside the paper. "I have nothing to do vid expenses you chose to have. I simply vant to pay fair price; and I *do* pay fair price. And so it ish to stand. If you all have made up your mind to go if dere ish nothing better for staying, vy *go*; for dere *ish* nothing better for staying. I have but von ting to do myself, and dat ish to pay de fair price."

"Mr. Stean," here resolutely put in Hilda, "if you really wish to pay fair prices, why not look over the paper? You will find that with boots at two seventy-five, and calico thirty-five cents a yard" —

"Dat ish none of my business," irately interrupted Stean; "my business ish only to pay fair prices, and it ish your business to make de fair price cover de expense of living. Plenty of women in Chicago villing to vork for me, and dat is proof my price is fair price."

"It is proof that Chicago is filled with hard, cruel men like yourself," retorted Debby, her eyes flashing with indignation in the very face of the person she addressed,—"men that grind down poor sewing-women in their employ to the last farthing; and the bitter struggle these poor women have to live is proof that God's anger will some time be wreaked upon you all!"

"Dat ish enough," coolly returned Stean; "I dont chose more. You can all go,—right dish minute. But, I tell you, you'll be coming back again, asking to do my vork—every von of you. But dere ish two dat shall never get vork ven dey come back,—no! not if dey starve! and that ish Debby Curtis and Hilda Ross. Dose two shall never show demself here again."

Having delivered himself of these words, giving particular emphasis to the prohibition upon Debby and Hilda, Stean left the sewing-room, followed, as when he had entered it, by the foreman.

The women and girls hung together for a while, whispering their indignation, their disappointment, and their anxieties; then quietly passed downstairs and out of the store, seeing nothing further of either of the men.

"It's ended in nothing!" said Debby, soon as she and Hilda were together in the street. "Yet I'd do it again, sure of its ending just the same. There's not a bit of spirit taken out of me; is there out of you, Hilda Ross?"

"No!" was the reply, in a more assured tone than her companion had probably looked for; for Debby had noticed a look of grave concern upon the countenance of Hilda. "I feel we've done right, come what may of it."

"The worst that can come of it is two of us being without a place for a while," rejoined Debby. "But, to be sure, that would be a big matter to many." She paused and looked gravely into the face of Hilda. "Maybe it's a big matter to you," she said.

"It is," replied Hilda, choking down a sob. "It's a great matter, because of my poor little sister, who is helpless as a baby through a hurt from a fall; and of my good elder sister, who has such a hard time to make both ends meet for us all. I feel my heart sink at the thought of going home to say I have lost my place at Stean's."

"Poor girl! Oh, I don't know that I can altogether say I would do it again, if it was undone!"

You blame me, Hilda Ross, — in your heart, you do. You *must* blame me!"

"I blame no living being but Stean," replied Hilda. "In reason, there's no one else to blame."

"That's all I ask," rejoined Debby. "Keep up your spirits, Hilda, child, and the bright day may come for us at last. A strike among sewing-hands is a new thing in Chicago; and when Stean comes to think of it, and some others to hear of it, good may grow out of it, — all the good we looked for."

They, soon after this, arrived at the parting place.

"Go to your sisters with as light a heart as you can," then said Debby, "for I shall try and do something for you. If the rest are driven to go back to Stean, he will take them, and it can't be at lower wages than they've been getting; so they're no worse off than before. I'll use my time in hunting up work for us both; and, I promise you, if I get but *one* place, you shall have it. I can better afford to lose time than you, Hilda Ross; so you shall have work first."

Hilda pressed in silence the hand extended her, then hurried homeward.

The first sound that greeted her upon entering the room was the moaning of little Lilly. The poor child was laboring under one of those paroxysms of pain from which she had latterly been almost exempt, and, though the soothing morphine had already been administered by Mabel, her suffering was acute. Sad was it to see the pale face with its wan and pinched features distorted with pain, and to hear the feeble voice raised in bitter wailing. Mabel hung over the pillow of the little sufferer, soothing the best she could with kind words, while the tears which coursed over her cheeks told all she was suffering at the sight of the little one's agony.

Every look and every moan of the child came like a reproach to Hilda; and she shrunk away to herself with feelings of wretchedness and self-condemnation. She had gone from home that morning, her heart filled with hope of bringing cheering tidings on her return. She had figured to herself Stean succumbing to a necessity forced upon him, and raising the wages of his hands to the really *fair price* that he affected to believe he paid. But, alas! it was the reverse of this picture that was before her. The strike was a failure;

and she had lost the place, which, after several days' search, was the only one attainable, and the small pay of which was, at least, better than nothing.

She dreaded to tell Mabel, — poor Mabel! already distressed at this bad turn of little Lilly's, — yet was impatient to have it told, and to know what her sister would say.

Hilda was not one to shield herself under false representations, and when the moment for the disclosure came, Mabel received the story without an attempt upon the narrator to make the part she had herself taken in it appear any better than it was.

Mabel was grieved, but, seeing Hilda's distress, said little as she could to add to it.

"I hope your new friend will succeed in finding you a place," she observed. "But, for the present, I am not sorry to have you home to help with poor little Lilly. Poor child! these dreadful spells of pain take all my attention; yet it is absolutely necessary I make progress with my work."

"If I understood vest-making, or if I wasn't so stupid about learning things," said Hilda, "I could do well by staying at home; for I might be

basting and making button-holes while you are at the machine."

"But you don't understand it," replied her sister; "so something else must be found for you."

Hilda repeated the encouragement held out to her by Debby Curtis.

"She's a kind, good girl," she said, "and will act up to her word with me. She's been at the sewing business for years, and understands a good deal more than I do about hunting up work; so I can safely leave it to her, and stay at home to help you with dear Lilly."

CHAPTER XVIII.

GOOD ANGELS.



HE next morning Hilda made preparation to be off early for some needful household purchases.

“I wish I had stayed at Stean’s long enough to earn a pair of boots,” she said, as she fastened on the over-worn ones which she and Mabel had cobbled up. “Think that I was working for that man nearly a week, and didn’t even make a pair of boots!”

Little Lilly was somewhat better this morning, and reclined, propped a little on her pillows, while she dressed and undressed her doll.

Bent on giving the child an agreeable surprise, Mabel had spent a while before retiring the night before in making a pair of neat boots for Miss Dolly, whose necessities in this respect had hitherto been quite overlooked. Lilly happened to be engaged in putting upon Dolly’s little feet, for about

the twentieth time since waking, those same pretty boots, when Hilda made the foregoing remark.

"I wish you had a good angel to make you a pair of new boots, overnight, Hilda, like my dolly has!" she said, suddenly pausing in her employment, and looking affectionately at her sister. "Mabel's my good angel, and Dolly's too. And where would we either of us be without her?"

"You'd be where *I* would be without her," exclaimed Hilda, — "in rags and without a home! O Mabel! why am I such a useless clod as I am? — worse, a good deal worse, than if I wasn't!"

The hat she had been about putting on was thrown from her hand, and, burying her face in the corner, she wept and moaned as though a new misfortune had come to her.

Mabel looked up from her basting, surprised at the sudden outbreak.

"Don't talk in that unhappy way, Hilda," she said, "and don't cry so. You are everything to me, — my companion and my solace. You cannot think how sadly I see you go from us, and with what pleasure I look for your return."

"Yes, with such news as I brought you last evening," groaned the unhappy girl. "O Mabel! the

terrible thoughts and dreams I had all night because of that business of Stean's has made me perfectly miserable to-day. There's no use denying it, I'm a wretched clog at your heels. And I had such hopes of helping you and Lilly when I first came to you ; but now they're all faded out, worse than faded out. It's hard that, with every wish to be of use to you, I'm to be a mean clog forever ! It makes me hate myself,—it fairly makes me hate the bright light of day."

With her countenance wearing a look of grave concern, little Lilly rebukingly put up her fingers.

" O Hilda ! " she said, in the solemn tone she sometimes used, " how can you expect any good angel will come to you overnight if you talk that way ? " Then suddenly changing her tone, she added, " But yes, Hilda dear ! there's a good angel pities you so much she'll forgive you, even if you do forget, once in a while, because you're unhappy. Dear, dear mother's that angel," in a whisper ; " and she's with us all the time."

" Oh, I want to believe it, Lilly ! "

" Well, Hilda, you *may* believe it. She's with me when I'm in pain, and she often whispers things to me that make me feel better. Sometimes, you

know, I forget, like you do, and I get cross and complaining and don't think for dear Mabel as I ought. Then that good angel keeps a little off, and I know I've troubled her, and feel ever so sorry. By and by she comes round again, and she forgives me, and says sweet things to me; and I say to her, — I say it down *here*," putting her hand on her heart, — "I say how sorry I am, and how I'm going to try, next time the pain's on me, to be more patient and more kind and thoughtful for poor Mabel."

"You're a sweet, dear little angel yourself!" cried Hilda, affectionately kissing her; "and the wonder is I can be so bad with such good people about me as you and Mabel. There's a black sheep in every flock, they say, Mabel," she added, with a forced laugh, "and I'm the black sheep in the Ross flock. You and Minnie and dear little Lilly are as white and pure as the Good Shepherd wants; but I'm black, — black and ugly and ill-contrived."

There was no one of the sisters could compare in beauty with Hilda, as she looked that moment, — her dark eyes flashing from under her hat, and her lips and cheeks flushed with her recent weep-

ing. Mabel appreciated all this, and looked affectionately and proudly upon her.

“Don’t talk of ugliness, without or within, Hilda,” she said, as the latter approached to give her a parting kiss. “God has blessed you with a good heart and made the heart speak in your face. Nor is there a black sheep in that Good Shepherd’s fold. All he claims as his own are white and pure.”

Hilda stayed on her errand considerably longer than her sister expected, — so long, indeed, that the latter began to be quite anxious about her.

At length, she returned. Every step she took, from first entering the house, was clearly audible to Mabel and Lilly through the firm tramp made by what was, beyond doubt, a new pair of boots on her feet. In fact, so unquestionable was the sound, that both her sisters doubted whether the person approaching was indeed the Hilda, who, almost bootless, had left them some hour and a half before; and these doubts were only entirely put to rest by the actual appearance in the room of the young girl herself. She didn’t hurry joyfully to their presence, however, but walked lei-

surely in, a look of depression very discernible about her.

“Dear Hilda! a new pair of boots!” cried little Lilly, dropping her doll and clapping her hands together. “A good angel has given them to you, I’m sure.”

Hilda did not reply. She was slowly putting from her the little packages she had procured for Mabel. She then took off her hat and shawl, and threw herself in the arm-chair by the window, her eyes, all the time, fixed upon Mabel.

A glance of the latter at the feet of her sister had assured her that the boots Hilda wore were not only new, but such as she had had no thought of purchasing, being of quite a superior finish and, of course, of a higher price.

“How is it, Hilda?” she asked. Mabel’s cheek was pale, and she had brought her sewing-machine to sudden silence. “How, my sister, have you got your boots?”

“Lilly says it was a good angel gave them to me,” replied the odd girl, “and I think she’s right.”

“I trust so, Hilda! But tell me, my dear sister, — put me out of anxiety, — if you can.”

Hilda regarded Mabel in silence. The former

looked sad, indeed, and on her cheek were traces of recent tears; but there was no appearance of emotion about her now. She was plainly in one of those quiet, unimpassioned moods, which, with her, generally followed on a period of unusual agitation. In these it always happened that her mind was the clearest and her reason most positively asserted itself.

“*If I can!*” she repeated. “I have got at your thought, Mabel; and no wonder you look so pale and strange! I, too, have heard of these things,—of poor girls being persuaded to take something for decent covering from,—well, from no good angels,—and, by and by, having a dear price to pay for them. But it was from none such as these I got my boots,—look! aint they good and pretty ones?—but from a kind, good soul, who really deserves to be called the angel Lilly says. But you mustn’t expect to hear of further success than my boots,” she added, with a sigh; “for there is the end of all the good which has happened to me this morning.”

She then proceeded to relate that she had gone to see Debby Curtis, hoping she might have done something toward finding work for her. Debby

had unlooked-for misfortunes of her own to relate. Her elder brother had volunteered and the younger one been drafted ; thus she was about to be parted from both, the regiments to which they were severally attached being expected to leave Chicago in a very few days. During their stay with the army Debby was to live with an aunt, who had been keeping house for them all, and she was to endeavor to make her wages cover a portion of the housekeeping expenses.

“I was busy all yesterday afternoon looking for work,” Debby continued, having gotten through with her story ; “for I was determined to do my best to keep things going at home, now the boys will be off. They’ll have money to send us while they live ; but then they may be killed or wounded, or they may come home crippled or sick and be in need of all they can save and all I can make. Joe gave me twenty dollars of his bounty-money, and I’m going to lay it by for a rainy day ; all, that is, but a few dollars I have spent for a poor girl that needs them more than I do.”

She then related her experiences of the previous afternoon, which had ended in her engaging a place for herself in ——’s sail-loft, and another,

conditionally, for Hilda ; that is, it was open to the latter, if she chose to take it.

The pay, Debby said, was about what they got at Stean's ; but the work harder, she feared, than any they had yet done. But, as there was no choice of work just now, she had thought it well to secure these places rather than nothing. She proposed they should go together the next morning to the sail-loft ; to which Hilda agreed, provided Lilly were well enough for her to be spared from home.

Debby next produced a pair of new boots, and proposed to Hilda that she should try them on. This was done, and the boots proved to be an excellent fit.

"They're not exactly the sort you were going to buy with your first pay from Stean's," Debby then remarked ; "but they will answer you better. I got them for you, Hilda, and you must keep them."

Great indeed was Hilda's surprise. But, delighted as she was with the boots, she unhesitatingly declined accepting them, until they were so pressed on her by the generous Debby, that she saw to refuse longer would be to give offence.

"No words can say how much I'm obliged to

that good Debby," said Hilda to Mabel, in conclusion. "But say, Mabel, was I right to take them?"

Mabel was deeply touched at this proof of kindness from a stranger.

"I cannot say you were wrong," she replied. "But should the time come, Hilda, — and pray God it may! — when you can make return to this good girl for her gift, you must be as determined of her acceptance as she was of yours."

"That's the way I've settled it to myself," rejoined Hilda, "and the thing I shall be happy to do. But, Mabel, the taking of these boots has made me feel as I never did before! Debby is a poor girl herself, and is going to begin to-morrow on the hardest sort of sewing she has ever done; yet, when I saw her so determined to have me take her present, I *couldn't* be half so determined not to take it, I did so want the boots! Tell me, Mabel, did it look mean and selfish? — will she think less of me than if I had stood firmly to refusing them?"

"You wanted them, Hilda, — wanted them badly, and Debby knew it and felt for you. If you know in your own heart you could do as much for her,

or for another, rest satisfied to enjoy the gift, and hope for the time to come when you can make a fitting return."

Tears were running down Mabel's cheeks, and she was obliged to stop and brush them away as she worked.

"I wouldn't feel badly about taking anything from a good angel," now put in little Lilly, who had listened with strict attention to what passed between her sisters; "and I think this good sewing-girl is a good angel, and was sent by God, like other good angels are. I don't see why you look so sorry, Hilda, and why Mabel cries so. There! her tears drop right down on the sewing-machine! I should think Hilda would just make much of her pretty boots, that'll let no more stones and water into her feet, and be happy as can be."

Mabel and Hilda looked at each other, and the look was presently followed by a smile from each.

"Dear, simple child!" said Hilda, "she can rebuke even *you*, Mabel, wise and good as you are."

These words were said *sotto voce* to the elder sister. Having then changed her new boots for the old slippers she wore at home, Hilda carried

the former to Lilly, and laid them on the bed beside her for the little girl's inspection.

. "My beautiful new boots, Lilly dear, that, as you say, God has kindly sent me, by a good angel," she said, "and that I'm going to think twice as much of as of anything else I ever had to put on. See what pretty, neat ones they are, and what good, thick soles they have! I am as grateful and happy, dear Lilly, as you were this morning over little Dolly's shoes, and I want you to know that I am. Oh, the good angels! the good angels, child! what would we be on earth without them?"

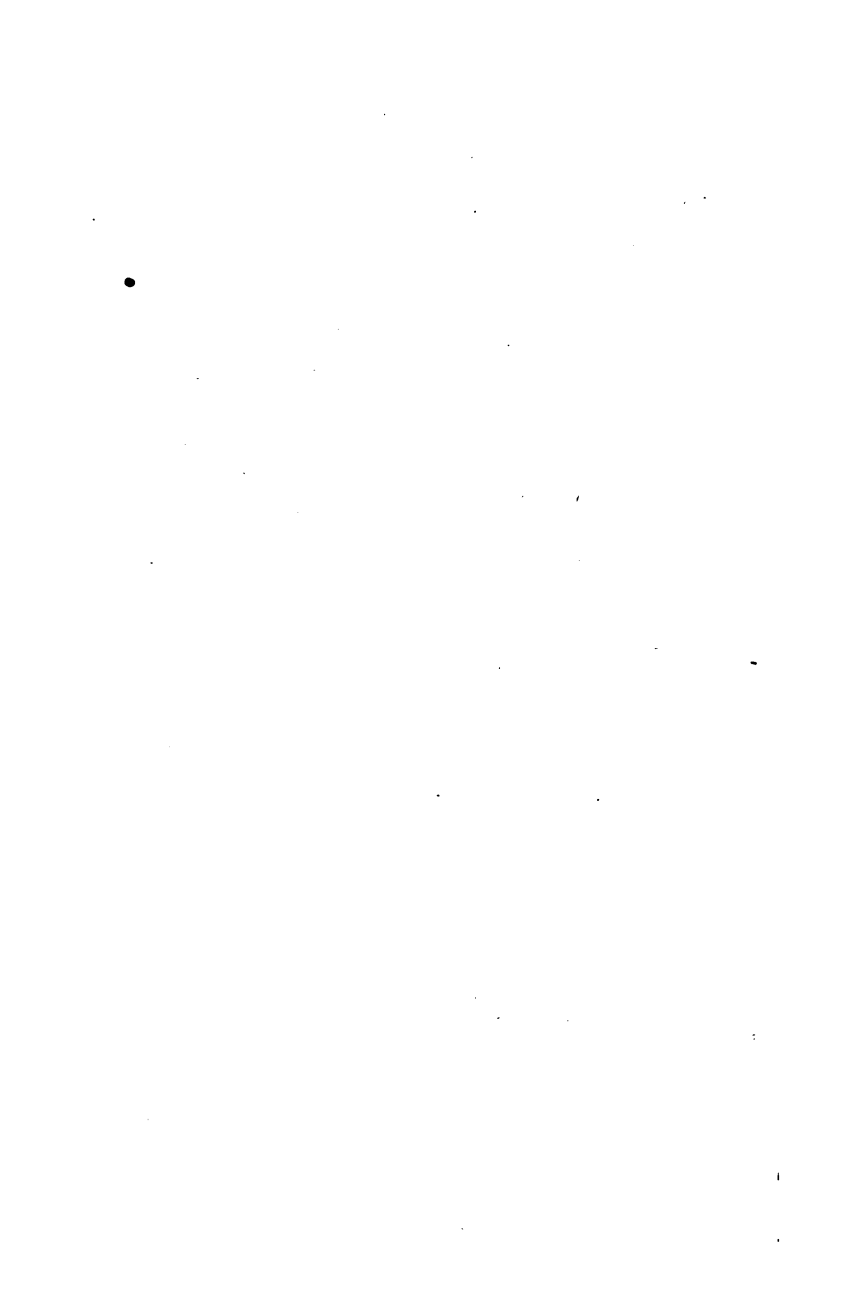
CHAPTER XIX.

COLD NOVEMBER.



THE cold and damp which ushered in the next day determined Mabel to keep Hilda at home, as she would herself be necessitated to be out. A fresh supply of coal must be gotten; and to pay for this, some vests must be taken home, and money procured for them. Mabel herself must do this; and quite early after her early breakfast, she prepared to depart on her mission.

In some respects Lilly did not appear much indisposed to-day; but, soon as Mabel was gone, she gave evidence of a restlessness which quite embarrassed Hilda. The latter was particularly awkward in her attempt to give ease to the little sufferer by change of position, and Lilly's frequent demands for such change, this morning, resulted in discomfort to herself as well as to her nurse. The cry of a ragman from the street





finally aroused a keen desire upon the part of the child to sit up at the window; and though Hilda combated the idea for some time, she was at length obliged to do her best to place the little girl comfortably in the big chair, which commanded, from its elevation and position, a view of the crowded neighborhood.

It being a chilly day, the sash was closed; and a thick shawl had to be thrown around the little invalid. With her face pressed against the glass, Lilly glanced curiously about her; for this was but the second time she had sat at the window since coming to their new home. Dreary enough was the scene. Not even the ragman was there, with his cart full of coarse bundles, and the little boy, such an odd miniature of himself, who sat behind him among the rags and so curiously echoed his cry. The time taken up by Hilda in endeavors to dissuade her little charge from a fancy which she believed fraught with risk to her had given the cart time to make its slow progress by the near houses, and disappear around a corner. The ragman had probably done small business in such neighborhoods to-day. There were plenty of *rags*, to be sure, but there was something in that Novem-

ber morning which suggested to their owners the wisdom of keeping them to wrap about their own wretched limbs.

A look of blank disappointment only first showed itself on Lilly's face, as the result of her survey ; but she, after a time, became so interested in watching the erratic wanderings of some half-grown chicks and goslings around and in the pools of muddy water, that she quite forgot to make comparisons between the ugly view before her and Mrs. Powers' garden.

This amusement did not last very long, however ; the old restlessness and pains returned to break her quiet, and little Lilly was even more urgent to be put back to bed than she had been to be placed at the window. A period of uneasiness and suffering followed, which seriously discomposed Hilda, who, in her experience of the little patient, had seen nothing exactly resembling it. Morphine was given, according to directions left by Mabel ; but its effect was slow, and Hilda looked more anxiously every minute for the return of Mabel.

The cold had sensibly increased since the time of Mabel's leaving ; and, thoughtful for the well-doing of Lilly, whose condition rendered her pe-

culiarly sensitive to cold or damp, the former made all the speed she could to get home to her. It was a great relief to Mabel, upon entering the room, to find that Hilda had been careful to keep up a good fire. Lilly was by this time somewhat soothed, though her countenance still gave evidence of distress.

"Now Mabel's come, I'll be better," said the poor child. "Dear Mabel! I'll just lay still, so still, and then I'll be all right. You'll stay by me, and I won't cry."

Patient child and devoted nurse! This was but the commencement of a long period of suffering and distress for both. The malaria of the wretched neighborhood was telling upon the enfeebled frame of little Lilly, making it yet more difficult for nature to contend with the disease under which she labored.

"This afternoon the coal will be here," said Mabel to Hilda, "and what we have will supply the fire till then. I think this cold turn is a commencement of winter."

"I'm afraid it is," replied Hilda, with a very grave look at Mabel. "I suppose you only got a

little coal, as I heard you say you had so much to do with the money? ”

“ I got four dollars’ worth,” rejoined Mabel. “ I recollected that the expense of hauling and putting in would be the same on a smaller quantity as on a larger.”

“ Then you have not enough to get the tea and sugar, Mabel? And didn’t you say there would be none for breakfast to-morrow, unless you got some? ”

“ There will be some for Lilly, dear Hilda ; for we will take none ourselves this evening.” This was said in a whisper, for Lilly’s eyes were fixed on the speaker. “ The poor child mustn’t be worried by knowing it,” Mabel proceeded, in the same tone, “ but, from this time, Hilda, until better days come for us, you and I must give up these expensive luxuries. Everything that *we* can give up *must* be given up,—you understand, Hilda?—given up that *she* may have all that is needed.”

“ Yes, Mabel, I’ll give up anything—everything for *that*.”

“ I knew you would, my sister.” And Mabel pressed the hand that had been placed upon her shoulder.

"Mabel, are we going to have a very, *very* hard time? Don't be afraid to tell me the worst."

"I trust and believe, dear Hilda, that we shall get through the winter with what, to us now, is comfort. I do not anticipate anything like want. All my efforts will be given to making sure of needful things for dear Lilly, and keeping out of debt, which to us would be ruin. We are both in health and strength, both ready to bear and to do all we can; therefore there is no cause to despond."

"Mabel, I commence at the sail-loft to-morrow, and I'll work, — oh, I'll work like two girls, but I'll get something worth bringing home to you! We're paid by the piece there, and one can make more than another. There's not a girl or woman of them all shall make more than I do."

"You will do your best, dear Hilda; I am sure of that. But don't expect too much at first, or you will have cause for disappointment. Remember the work is new to you, and must be particularly trying on the hands. If you can do no better than keep at it, you will, after a time, work well, I don't doubt."

"Mabel, I *will* keep at it; and from this time I

make no more complaint of work or prices ; all I will think of is doing as much as I can. I *must* make enough to cover all my expenses to you, and maybe I may even get something, over and above, to help you along with poor Lilly. How proud and happy I'd be to do that ! Don't despair of me, Mabel. "

" I never despair of you, my sister. "

" How I wish it were to-morrow, Mabel ! I want so to be trying this new work that I hope to make something at. But there are hours before to-morrow, and I have plenty to do in them, too. I must get at my mending ; for there'll be no time but after dark for *that* when I'm once entered at the sail-loft. "

She went to the closet and brought forth various articles of clothing.

" There's one dress, " she said, handling it with care, " that needs no stitch in it, and wont for many a day to come. It's as fine and good a merino as cousin Algin got for herself ; and I'm sure, I'm obliged to her for it, — more now than the day she gave it to me. That dress and the shawl, got at the same time, will be everything to me this winter. When I have them on, I feel a little more like old

times, — less like those poor sewing-girls who are almost reduced to their last rag. Mabel, I think it would take all soul out of me to have nothing better than many of those poor girls have.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE SAIL-LOFT.



BUILDING of four stories, three rooms of which were sewing-rooms, and two hundred women and girls employed in each room.

Six hundred hands, in all, had Mr. — employed, — six hundred souls to be raised by the something-to-be-hoped-for, so essential to us all, to the better of which they were capable, *if he would*, — six hundred souls to be crushed to the worst of which they were capable, *as he chose*.

Did that one man ever feel the weight of those six hundred souls upon *his* soul? Did it ever occur to him what a vast field he had there for doing good, and that, just as he did not the *good*, he did *evil*, even without limiting, as he did, the wages of those poor women to a pittance on which it was impossible, simply *impossible* to live? No, surely no. For, had the thought of this presented itself to him,

he must have shrunk back, affrighted at the responsibility he took upon himself.

Who shall attempt to sum up the evil given birth to and fostered through the wholesale wrongdoing of that one man? Who shall say how many more it shall reach, or how long it shall live? Into another generation perhaps, — perhaps longer. But, if no mind of finite power can compute the dread account, there is One who can do the work, and who will do it. He will do it, because He has said so; and the great sum-total brought up by Him none can dispute. What a heavy reckoning this for one soul! God of might and justice! for *one soul!*

The room into which Debby Curtis and Hilda Ross were shown was so crowded that for many of the sewers there was no seat. Two hundred hands were here employed upon the making of wagon-covers. These covers were fifteen feet in length, and ten feet in width, with a seam up the middle, and a finishing hem around the sides. Besides this there were ten eyelet holes.

The price paid for the making of a wagon-cover was twenty cents!

The sewing of the heavy sail-cloth, of which they

were made, necessitated a palm-thimble on the hand of the worker ; that is a strap passed around the right hand with a thimble upon the palm. With this instrument the sharp, three-sided sail-needle was pressed through the cloth.

Before they had been half an hour so employed, Debby and Hilda found that it was becoming quite impossible for them much longer to continue. Not only was the pain, inflicted by pressing through the great needle approaching the point of torture, but the muscles called into play by the effort were so weakened, through the unwonted tax upon them, that they refused longer to do duty, or did it so ineffectually that the work progressed at a snail's pace.

Hours passed by and found the two hundred women and girls still busy at their work, silence upon every tongue, and a look of weariness and hopelessness upon every face. There was not here even the sound of the busy sewing-machine to enliven the forced stillness. There was a tradition of a girl,—she must have been a new hand,—who one day attempted *to sing* at her work. How long the poor creature might have kept up a divertisement, which, through its novelty in the place,

startled every worker in the room, it is quite impossible to say ; for the foreman was not off duty, — he never was, — and he peremptorily hushed the song before it had progressed to the eighth bar. Still it was *something* that a song had been attempted in that room ; it was something to think about, and to whisper about ; something, too, as a warning to any other, who, in momentary forgetfulness of her woes and the iron rule under which she toiled, might be tempted to raise her voice in the stillness of working hours.

By and by came round the hour of twelve, and benumbed and stiffened hands resigned the needle, and wearied and stiffened limbs changed their constrained position for an upright one. There was an hour of respite from labor, — an hour in which the silence imposed upon speech might be suspended, and in which the exhausted frame might receive such refreshment as the small pay for its labor could procure.

Of the two hundred sewers in the room, one only continued to ply her needle, making no preparation for repast like the rest, — never even so much as lifting her eyes upon the sounding of the hour, or the stir made by her fellow-laborers.

She was a woman, apparently of some thirty odd years of age, of slight proportions, and of peculiarly sad and subdued expression. She very soon attracted the notice of Debby and Hilda, who, being strangers in the crowd, remained beside each other as they partook of their simple meal.

"You're wondering why she keeps on at her work?" said a young girl near them.

"Yes," replied Debby. "Surely she must be tired, and want her dinner like the rest of us?"

"Little doubt of that. But its Martha Christie, and she's working so steady to make her two covers a day. That, you see, will be the whole of forty cents to her! Such pay's bad enough for us girls," she added, in a whisper, and with a glance around to make sure the foreman did not overhear, — "and every girl of us knows just how little way it goes, — but it's worse still for poor Martha; for she's a married woman, and her husband's off to the war, and she left with three small children. She managed to get along while he sent her money, though it was but little; but she's had no tidings of him since the battle of Pittsburg Landing, that he was in. He was down among the missing then, and she don't know to this day if he's dead or

taken prisoner. She's entitled to her bounty whether he's dead or alive; but, though she's applied for it, through some reason she can't get it. It would be two dollars a week to her, and that would help her a great deal; while, as it is, she has to make the whole support herself for the four of them. She had better work than this some time ago, and work she could do at home, too, which was well on account of the children; but she got sick and lost it, and now is glad to come to the sail-loft. She's only been here a week; but she lives near us, so I knew her before. My mother keeps her children while she's from home, and took care of her, too, while she was sick. No one could help but want to do what they can for poor Martha Christie! but then we're poor enough ourselves, and can't do much. She's only been making three covers in two days till now; but she's trying to-day to get along faster. The truth is, she sees starvation staring them in the face and is desperate."

"Poor thing!" said Debby and Hilda, in a breath.

"I wonder she doesn't apply to the parish,"

added Debby. "Surely a case like hers would be relieved?"

"Perhaps she'd be willing," was the reply; "for the spirit is pretty well taken out of her by all she has gone through; but then she made a promise to her husband never to throw herself on the parish while she could possibly make things hang together. He was a good mechanic, making good wages, and they lived quite comfortably only a year back; so, though of course he didn't think of her getting so down as she is, he had a sort of pride to keep his family from being called paupers."

Debby had a good supply of biscuits with her, and, taking some in her hand, she approached the persevering work-woman.

"Take some of my biscuits," she said. "We're all eating, and you need it too."

Martha paused and glanced up at the speaker. The look from those dim, hollow eyes haunted Debby for long after.

"Thank you, I have something here;" and Martha opened, in a quick, nervous way, a little basket beside her, "only I didn't want to take the time to eat it."

While speaking, she hurriedly took from the

basket an old crust of bread, — it contained nothing else, — and commenced to eat.

Debby silently laid a couple of her biscuits on the knee of the woman, and put the remainder into the now empty basket. Again Martha lifted her eyes to the girl's face. It was a dim, blank look, that said nothing unless it was a little surprise that a stranger should trouble herself about her.

Hilda, who stood near, noticed that she only eat the crust, putting the two biscuits Debby had placed on her knee into the basket along with the others. She was sure she was reserving them for the poor children at home. Hilda also noticed that, having hurried through with her crust, Martha more than once glanced from the work she had resumed in the direction of the water ; and, believing she was reluctant to interrupt her sewing to go after some, the young girl brought to her a mug of it. She was repaid by such a look as the poor creature had twice bestowed upon Debby, Martha drinking the contents of the mug so eagerly as to satisfy the donor how much she needed it.

The day wore on, and the hour for closing up work came round. One after another the workers presented to the foreman their finished covers,

which were severally examined and put aside, the inspector giving for each a ticket which entitled the holder to twenty cents. These tickets could any time be presented at the office, upon which the paying-clerk would give for every one the sum named.

All looked on with interest as poor Martha moved forward, dragging along her two covers, and we will believe there were few of her companions but rejoiced to see she had succeeded in completing them by the appointed hour.

The foreman examined them as he had done the others.

"These wont do," he then carelessly said, returning them to her. "They must be done over again to get you your tickets."

Martha stood as though turned to stone. She had evidently not dreamed of such a result for her efforts, — she had overlooked the possibility of losing all by attempting to do too much. Her stitches proved too long for the required measure, and the foreman, whose business it was to see that they were of the required measure, in his business-like way, rejected her work.

“ Poor, poor thing ! ” whispered Hilda to Debby.
“ How quite heart-broken she looks ! ”

“ Stand aside there, and let others come up with their work,” said the foreman again, in his business-like way, addressing Martha. And Martha took a hasty step, as though startled from a dream, and moved off with her two covers.

“ What will you do ? ” gently asked Debby, who followed her to the place where she mechanically put them by.

“ Rip them up, and do them over again.”

There was a different tone now in the voice ; neither did the words come in the brisk way of before, but slowly and heavily, the speaker’s eyes bent not on Debby, but on the two covers at her feet.

“ More than double your work. What a pity ! ”

“ Yes, — more than double.”

She turned from the covers and moved away, Debby and Hilda, and not a few others, following with pitying eyes her fragile form, as she slowly left the sail-loft.

The two or three following days found Martha in her accustomed place, busily engaged in ripping and re-sewing the rejected covers. She spoke to

no one, looked at no one, but devoted the mid-day respite to the accomplishment of her task, as she had done on the day of Debby and Hilda first seeing her. Each day, however, the good-hearted Debby slipped some of her biscuits into the little basket which carried the poor crust designed for the laborer's dinner. The work was concluded at last, the *forty cents were earned*; and after that Martha's place was vacant in the sail-loft.

"She is sick," replied the young girl who had spoken of her to the new-comers, when questioned by them concerning her neighbor. "The poor thing just used herself up on those two covers; and, indeed, she wasn't fit to be working when she was at them. She's in bed now, too ill to raise her head, or to know well what's doing around her; so her pushing for a living for this time's over. The neighbors have been doing the mite they could, and they've given notice about her; so, most likely, to-morrow she'll be moved to the hospital, and the children put into the almshouse. Poor woman! how hard she has struggled against this very thing! She didn't want, with her children, to be *paupers*, you know."

CHAPTER XXI.

HEART SCALDS.



READY indeed were Hilda's experiences at her present place of labor. When she returned home, it was with her hands aching and bleeding from the painful pressure of the large three-sided needle, and the wounds it otherwise inflicted. How completely were fading out the hopes in which she had sped to her new employment!

"Debby gets along better than I do," she, one evening, said in desponding tone to Mabel. "She's a good bit bigger and stronger than I am, and her hands are almost twice the size. *My* hands are just good at nothing! They aint big enough for heavy work, yet they can't move fast and neatly as I want them at other sorts. I wish I could find out what they *are* good for. I'm sure it hasn't turned up yet."

"Poor, dear little hands!" said Lilly, caressing

them with her own. "How they're swelled and bruised, worse — oh, yes! — worse than they've been yet. I do wish, Mabel dear, Hilda mightn't go any more to that dreadful sail-loft!"

"I wish, too, she might never have to go again, dear Lilly," replied Mabel. "And really, Hilda, I do not see how you can go to-morrow. By forcing yourself to work with your hands in this condition, you will eventually lose time."

"But I can't bear to give up," replied Hilda. "They say if you only keep steady to it, after a while the hands get hardened to it, and the right hand gets so horny in the palm it can feel nothing. They call it getting the hand *palmed*. Plenty of girls have their hands in this way. They're hard as can be, and all drawn crooked and gathered up, this way;" and she distorted her hand to show the appearance given by the "palming."

"Will you let her do it, Mabel, dear?" Lilly said. "Will you let poor Hilda get her nice little hands all drawn up and hard like" —

Hilda checked the remainder by gently placing her left hand over the lips of the little girl.

"Of course she will," she replied; "and, of course, I'd be only too glad to have it so. But

there are many, many days between now and that comfortable condition of things, my little sister ; and there's no jumping them, neither. I've been looking at hands to-day, that, a year or so ago, I'd have been foolish enough to cry if mine were like ; but, you may believe, I'd be proud and happy to have these useless things like them now."

"I'm sure I'm glad they're not," rejoined Lilly, — "aint you, Mabel ? "

Mabel sighed, as, for a moment, she paused in her work. "I'd be happy," she said, "if Hilda were not obliged to do anything hurtful to her hands ; but we cannot always choose what we will do, my little Lilly."

"Yes, Mabel dear, I know," again said the little, feeble voice from the bed ; "I know, only I had forgot. O Mabel, Mabel ! what a *dreadful* thing it is to be poor !"

"There are very much worse things, my darling."

"Yes, Mabel ; to be ill and suffering is one of them. Maybe it wouldn't seem so very dreadful to me to know we're poor, if I was all right and running about, as I once was. But it's so tiresome

to be all the time lying here ; it makes everything seem the worst, you know."

For another moment Mabel paused in her work ; and her eyes filled with tears as she fixed them pityingly upon the little sufferer.

" But never mind, Mabel dear," said the affectionate child ; " it's not so very, *very* tiresome, and sometimes, you know, I feel almost easy, and that makes up for the rest. The worst thing is to see you working so hard, and to know I'm all the time giving you trouble."

But little Lillie was not always so thoughtful for her sister. The unfavorable change, which had taken place in her condition had, in a measure, warped the evenness of her temper. Constant suffering, of a greater or less degree, had the effect of rendering her, at times, fretful and impatient, uncertain in her wishes, and even a little selfish in her exactions.

Mabel understood too well the condition of the poor child to be surprised at this ; and when, at moments of comparative ease, Lilly would remorsefully reproach herself for her want of consideration for one so kind to her, it became the *sister's* task to soothe and to forgive, — for Lilly

was not satisfied but to have her say she *forgave*, — and to encourage, as she best could, to future patience.

The next morning Hilda found her hands so painfully sensitive to the slightest touch that she was obliged to absent herself from her working place.

“Some good shall come of my having to give up,” she said to Mabel. “You must take a walk in this clear morning air, Mabel, while I look to Lilly. You’re looking so pale and thin, as I never saw you yet; and the exercise will do you good. Really, you have had nothing to call a walk for these three or four weeks.”

Mabel sighed. It was a habit growing on her to sigh, less, it appeared, from depression of spirits, than from physical fatigue.

“I scarcely think I can take the time,” she replied, with a wistful glance through the window at the bright blue sky. “If I keep steady at these vests, I may get the remainder of this second dozen finished by evening; and I am wanting the money so badly.”

“I never heard you say before that you were quite without money, Mabel!” And Hilda looked

anxiously at the face her sister bent over the button-holes she was making.

"I do not consider that I am without it now," said Mabel, "since there are some dollars so nearly owing me on the vests. But you can understand, I am anxious to get them done. I am owing for the last tea; and debt, you know, is a thing I make every effort to avoid."

"I know, Mabel, for you have deprived yourself of many things I thought essential to avoid it."

"Well, it has come at last, or rather, I should say, it threatens to come. But, if I can get my vests finished, I shall be able to pay the debt before night, and get more tea; for the last will not last through to-morrow; nor will the sugar."

"I'm glad *we* have given them up!" cried Hilda, "at least that *I* have. For you ought to take tea, Mabel; you sit up working nights, and have scarcely any exercise, and you need it more than at any time yet."

"I can do without it," was the quiet reply. "You and I will go share and share together, dear Hilda."

But, lightly as she took the resigning of her tea, it was a grave privation to Mabel. It was a

refreshment that the overtasked frame needed ; especially when most of the night hours had been passed at the sewing-machine, or in some household labor that the day-work had left no moment for. There was a feature attending its resigning, too, which caused Mabel no small embarrassment : this was the necessity of concealing the fact from Lilly. It had been the child's delight to have her dear Mabel take her cup of hot tea at the time she took her own, and she could not understand why her sister should now, as she said, prefer to take it at some other time.

" You used to say it was sweeter to take it along with your little Lilly," she would reproachfully remark ; " and now you let her take hers all alone, and it don't taste half so good."

Mabel had no resource under such home-thrusts but to engage the child's attention on something else.

" May God, in his goodness, enable me still to provide such comforts for *her* !" in her own heart, the poor girl would say. " I can bear up under every trial but to see *her* want !"

That evening, which was Saturday, the vests were completed. Mabel carried them home, and,

having received the money due her, hastened to liquidate her debt, and procure the articles needful for Lilly on the coming Sunday. Again she had a few dollars in hand, and again was free from debt ; and her sleep that night and her rest of the next day were sweeter for the knowledge.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAST DOLLAR.



HE rest of two days for her hands permitted Hilda to recommence work upon Monday, with little inconvenience but what she had suffered upon the first day. With every day after that, she found herself getting more accustomed to the necessary exertion, and proudly said to Mabel she believed her hands were growing larger and stronger, and would, by and by, be all she wished them.

One morning, not more than three hours after leaving home, she suddenly presented herself before Mabel again, her left hand wrapped in bandages, and a look of intense distress upon her countenance.

"Home so soon, Hilda?" exclaimed Mabel;
"and hurt, I fear, my poor sister."

"Yes, hurt *again*, Mabel."

With her free hand, Hilda pulled off and threw

aside her hat in the impatient way she was apt to do when out of spirits and out of humor.

"One of those great spikey, three-sided needles ran into my palm and made such a dreadful hurt I nearly fainted," she continued. "Debby Curtis was so kind! But then, she always is. She stopped her own work and took me round to a doctor, and he dressed it for me. He says it's a serious hurt, and he can't say yet exactly how bad it will be, and that I must keep it quiet as possible, and come to him every morning to have it looked to. It hurts me so, you can't think, Mabel; and yet it has a strange numb feeling, too."

"I am sorry for you, my poor sister. It must, indeed, be very painful."

"Oh, I'm not thinking about the hurt a bit," quickly rejoined Hilda. "It's the loss of time and money goes so hard with me. I've been earning a mere drop in the bucket, any way, and now I'm forced to give up that little help to you. I've got sixty cents somewhere in my pocket," she added, fumbling for it; "and that's *the last*, maybe, I shall be able to earn for a week or more. There it is," laying the money on the sewing-machine before her sister. "If it were sixty dol-

lars, Mabel, I'd be the happiest girl this day in Chicago ; but it's only a mean sixty cents, and I'm — I'm the most miserable."

"Thank you, dear Hilda," kindly said Mabel, as she took up the money. "Sixty cents is a good deal to us, you know, much more than sixty dollars to many another."

"And what, after all, is sixty dollars, or sixty dollars sixty times told, to what is really *ours*, if we could get it?" suddenly exclaimed Hilda. "If justice were justice and right right, there'd be no need for your toiling this day, Mabel, or for poor little Lilly being kept, to her injury, in this neighborhood of stagnant ponds and pigsties."

Mabel gave a glance to the bed, where her little patient lay under partial effect of morphine, then a cautioning look at Hilda.

"Don't let us trouble ourselves about justice or right, Hilda," she said. "The law gives us no more than we have, and we must be content."

"You think I mean the business of the endorsement," hastily rejoined Hilda ; "but you don't know. I meant" — she paused a moment, then added, in a different tone, "Well, anyway, we didn't make the law, any more than we did peo-

ple's notions of justice and right, and we can't change one or the other. But I have news for you, Mabel, — something we haven't looked for, — *bad* news, of course, — I never have any other sort. Debby Curtis is going to leave Chicago, — going to live with her aunt in St. Louis."

Mabel expressed her regret.

"Yes, to-morrow's her last day in the sail-loft," continued Hilda. "A sister of her aunt has died in St. Louis, and the husband wants some one to look after the house and children, and to help in his dry-goods store. Debby and her aunt will take charge of all, between them. It's a good thing for Debby, for she's almost worked to death at —'s, but a mighty bad thing for me. It's nothing but Debby has kept up my spirits at that horrid sail-loft, and I don't know what I shall do without her."

"Be self-reliant, Hilda. You know you made strong resolutions on this point some time since."

The hurt turned out a very ugly affair, and gave no promise of permitting Hilda very soon to return to her work. She made herself useful in such ways as she could to Mabel, but, with the use of *one hand* only, her services were not of the sort

to reconcile her to the temporary abandonment of her sewing. Had Mabel been able to procure as many vests as she now found time to make, she would have been less anxious concerning the future; but, though Hilda exerted herself to the utmost to keep her in a good supply, she frequently had to give her time and labor to work which did not compensate her so well.

One certain fact was ever before Mabel, — money, at times, went *out* so much faster than it came *in*, that there was prospect of her being, before a very great while, reduced to that dreaded *last dollar* of which Hilda talked so much. Still her heart clung, in its strong faith, to a hope of better things for them, and many were the fervid prayers she sent up to Him whose ear is never closed to the cry of the orphan and friendless. One thing only had power to move the devoted girl from the steady, thought subdued, cheerfulness which was her customary tone, and this was the suffering of her little Lilly.

The poor child's spells of pain had not only increased in violence, but were more frequent and of longer duration. It was plain to be seen, too, that her frame, enfeebled by disease, was daily be-

coming less able to bear up under the exhausting effect of suffering. There were seasons when Hilda did not need to be reminded by a glance or a word, that it was no time for repining or impatience, or for that free expression of foreboding fears, in which she, not unfrequently, indulged. Past and future must needs be forgotten in the *present*, when the delicate form of the scarcely more than infant sister writhed on its bed of agony, and when the pale lips sent forth cries for that relief that the loving ones could not give.

One afternoon, Hilda returned dispirited from a search after work for Mabel.

"I am sorry you could get nothing but these shirts," Mabel said. "A good supply of vests, like that of two weeks since, would have kept off some difficulties which are on us now."

Her tone was one that Hilda seldom heard from her, and a look in her face proved that she had been weeping.

"I see,—I know it all!" replied Hilda. "You have come to the last dollar, at last, Mabel, and we are beggars! Oh, poor, poor Lilly!"

"Thank God, not *beggars*, Hilda; but I have *indeed* come to the last dollar, so long talked of.

Indeed, the one I have remaining is due our grocer and baker, and we are again without tea and sugar for Lilly, and bread for us all. Poor Lilly's medicines are nearly exhausted, too ; and this terrible cold has been so expensive on fires, that a new supply of coal will be needed in a few days. In another week, our third month's rent falls due, as you know, and that is a matter that admits of no delay."

Hilda was looking very pale.

"And you have but one dollar, Mabel?"

"Only one dollar."

"And you have seen it coming to this, Mabel! and you wouldn't even talk about it,—you wouldn't let me know how near it was!"

"And why should I? Would it have done you any good to know how near it was, my sister? But now has come the time to *act*, and that is why I speak to you."

"How act, Mabel? What can you do?"

"I will get money on the watch, Hilda."

"Yes, yes ; the thing that poor Minnie saved us from months ago! But how dreadful to have to sell it!"

"I shall not sell it, Hilda ; though that, too,

might have become a very possible thing with us. I only propose to get some money by putting it in pawn."

Hilda's ideas of "putting in pawn" were very vague, and it is likely Mabel's were scarcely less so; but it was a plan the latter had long thought of, and that she saw was now the only one to get her through her difficulty.

"*Pawning* is a very different thing from *selling*, of course, Mabel," said Hilda, looking considerably encouraged. "If a thing's sold you can never get it again, while, if it's only pawned, — why," —

"If only pawned, it can at any time be redeemed. I'm grieved to have to do this, Hilda. I feel no better reconciled to it for all these months I've been thinking of it; but how much worse it would be to have to part with the watch altogether! I shall put on my things, and go about it at once."

The hat and cloak were soon put on; and then Mabel took from its place above Lilly's pillow, being careful not to attract the attention of the child, the valued watch, and, carefully wrapping it up, deposited it in a small box. She looked so composed as she did this, that any one might have be-

lieved it was a matter in which she felt but ordinary concern.

But Hilda knew better ; and, as she looked from the pale cheek of her sister to the little box she still held uncovered in her hand, she felt no less for her than for herself. Lifting the watch from the box, as Mabel was about to put on the cover, Hilda pressed it to her lips, and then burst into tears.

“ Don’t take it so hard, my sister,” whispered Mabel, in a voice scarcely so calm as her looks ; “ we shall see it again, you know, — we shall have it *our own* again.”

“ But when ? O Mabel ! if I could only bear up under things as you do ! ”

She returned the watch to the box, and Mabel presently covered it from view.

“ Lilly is so nearly sleeping,” said the latter, after a look at the still form of the child, “ that if you are perfectly quiet she will not be roused before I get back. I shall bring with me the medicine, for she will need it through the night.”

Denying herself the gratification of a kiss, for fear of waking her, Mabel left the room for her visit to the pawnbroker’s.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PAWNBROKER.



ABEL had some time since decided upon the place to which she would go when the hour arrived for disposing of her watch. The store of her selection was upon Clark street; and, at such times as she found herself in its neighborhood, she had passed by it, and gazed with interest into the window or door, — perhaps even halting awhile at the former, comforting herself with the belief that by making herself so well acquainted with the place there would be little embarrassment in visiting it on business.

Notwithstanding all these preludes, however, when the hour of positive action arrived she found herself timid and agitated in the extreme; and when she actually got to the store, such a trembling came over her, that she saw she should never accomplish her object in the confidence and com-

posure she believed necessary. Passing slowly by the door, she looked in. Through the glass she perceived the proprietor of the store engaged with a customer, and, seeing it was no time for her to enter, she passed on.

Having gone the length of a square or two, she turned and began to retrace her steps. A young gentleman was approaching, at no great distance; and it appeared to her he was regarding her with more than ordinary attention. As they neared and passed each other, she became satisfied this was the case; and she was both annoyed and embarrassed by the scrutiny he bestowed upon her. Her mind was too deeply set on the business she had on hand, however, to retain thought of this after the stranger had gone by, and she proceeded again to the pawnbroker's, taking a look through the glass, in passing, as she had done before. The visitor was still there; and she passed on to the window, thinking to remain there a while, or even to stay till she should find the proprietor alone.

But few persons were passing, and she therefore felt comparatively little concern as to attracting attention. With her heart painfully beating, she gazed abstractedly upon the various arti-

cles of jewelry and other matters on exhibition, feeling so little disposition to move away, that she believed she would remain, were it a half-hour, till she should see the wished-for coming forth of the persevering visitor.

How long she waited she could not tell; it seemed to her a very long time, — but still he did not come; and, discomposed by several persons who ranged themselves beside her at the window, Mabel moved off, and turned the corner to while away a longer time. About fifty feet around the other street she found herself face to face with the young gentleman she had before met. This time he not only attentively regarded her, but touched his hat as to an acquaintance. Mabel slightly returned the salutation, with a faint remembrance of his features as she hurried past.

The next moment she found him again at her side, and accosting her.

“I see, Miss Ross, you scarcely recognize me,” he said. “My name is Barrett, — Ralph Barrett.”

Mabel bowed again. She now remembered this young Ralph Barrett, though she had been in his company but a very few times. His father was the

man, by endorsing for whom, Mr. Ross had brought to poverty his wife and children.

"I knew you in a moment, Miss Ross," continued young Ralph, "though it has been over two years since we met. "I have no right to expect *you* to remember *me*, however," with a sidelong glance at the beautiful face beside him; "since, in remembering me, you must remember so much which it would be well had never happened."

Mabel was surprised both at the words and the tone in which they were spoken. Such entire want of feeling for the affliction of her family had been shown by the parents of the young man that she was unprepared for this evidence of it in himself. Her few words of reply were so constrained, however, that her companion could not but perceive that his presence was unwelcome and embarrassing.

Mabel's eyes were upon her own well-worn boots and coarse dress, and these formed so strong a contrast to the shining apparel of young Ralph that she felt herself strangely out of place beside him. A consciousness, too, of the errand on which she was bent made her feel yet more uncomfortably than she otherwise would have done.

A very few words more passed between them,

and Mabel then bade him a hurried adieu, and turned back to the pawnbroker's.

The store was now, to all appearance, empty, and Mabel unhesitatingly went in. She had glanced once or twice about her, and taken her stand at the counter, before she perceived a man sitting behind it; the seat on which he rested being so low that the top of his head and his eyes only were above the counter. The appearance of the man was not one to inspire confidence or ease, and Mabel felt embarrassed as to how she should open her business with him.

She produced her little box, and, having opened it, laid it upon the counter, her heart beating so violently that she could scarcely breathe.

The man gave a sharp look at her, then arose and took the watch from the box, and examined it carefully both within and without.

"How much you vant on dis vatch?" he asked, fixing his sharp eye a second time upon the young girl.

"As much as I can get. I am in great need of the money, or I wouldn't think of parting with my watch."

Another sharp look.



AT THE PAWN BROKER'S.

“I will give fifteen dollar on it.”

Mabel's heart seemed suddenly to have ceased beating, and became a weight in her breast.

The amount named was less by a half than she had looked to get, and as in the brief moment of her silence her thoughts summed up the various present necessities to be covered, and the early future ones unprovided for, she arrived at the terrible conclusion that, could she make no better bargain than the one offered her, she would in a very few weeks be again at her last dollar.

“Oh, give me more than that!” in a sort of desperation, she cried. “It is a valuable watch; I know my father gave more than one hundred dollars for it, — and I need money so much. Can't you let me have twenty, — twenty-five?”

The man smiled, or rather distorted his features in a manner intended for a smile, then rejoined, —

“Dat too much, entirely; fifteen is all I can say. De vatch is old vatch and need repair. Fifteen is vere much for it.”

Mabel was about assuring him that it was not five years since the watch was purchased, and that it must be in good condition, as it kept excellent time, when a voice beside her interrupted to say, —

“Let me speak to you one minute, Miss Ross.”

It was Mr. Ralph Barrett who had entered the store very soon after herself, and heard what passed between her and the pawnbroker.

Mabel looked for a moment upon the face that expressed so much kindly interest, then took up the watch and retired with young Ralph to the step of the store.

“Excuse me, Miss Ross, I followed you in,” he hastily said. “I thought there was something like this; and, knowing you must be quite inexperienced, I wished to guard you from imposition. Your father’s watch!” and a look of deep pity came over the speaker’s handsome features. “If I could but persuade you to let *me* be the holder of it! Twenty-five dollars was the sum you named. I would be happy to place it at your disposal. The watch is as safe with me as with this man, — may I not say safer?”

Mabel’s heart gave a great bound. The sound of twenty-five dollars was sweet to her. She was almost overpowered to find it so unexpectedly within her reach, after her crushing disappointment of a few minutes before.

While he spoke, her eyes had been fixed upon

those of young Barrett, and she felt that a grateful look had come into her own, — a look which expressed her happy relief, and her faith in his kindly feeling. Still she hesitated. Young Ralph was so much a stranger to her. Was it altogether right to accept this service at his hands?

He evidently read her thought, for he hastened to say, —

“Remember the peculiar circumstances of the case, Miss Ross, — the indebtedness of our family, — your own misfortunes” —

Mabel looked up again. “You are kind,” she said, “and my necessities are great.”

She was about to place the box, with the watch, in his hand, when a trifling circumstance caused her to pause. It was a very trifling circumstance, merely a suspicion of a smile which turned the corners of Mr. Ralph’s lip; but, slight as it was, it changed the whole current of Mabel’s thoughts and feelings.

“I thank you,” she said, rather coldly, — she feared too much so, — “but, since I must part with the watch, I prefer to do so in the way I proposed.”

She moved to re-enter the store.

“Pray reflect again, Miss Ross! This man

takes undue advantage of you, — you suffer yourself to be imposed upon.”

“To be open to imposition is one of the misfortunes attending poverty, Mr. Barrett,” Mabel rejoined, a little bitterness in her tone; and with these words she returned to the store. She did not know if young Ralph had departed; she only knew he did not again follow her in, and she laid the box once more open upon the counter.

“You will take de fifteen dollar?” said the pawnbroker, again taking out the watch, and again examining it.

“Yes; if you will give me no more. But I know it is very little for a watch like that.”

“It is good deal; more nor another would give,” and he began to count out the money.

“I can’t tell, — I have no time to inquire further,” said Mabel. “I will take your offer.”

The sum named was given her, and also a little red ticket, with a number on it corresponding with one he fastened upon the watch, and Mabel left the store.

She left it with such different feelings than she had gone in! She was no longer agitated and trembling, but calmly self-possessed. She was, in-

deed, carrying home with her but half the sum she had expected to receive ; but she was grateful for this, little as it was, — grateful, because she had gotten it in a way that laid her open to no unlooked-for embarrassment, — grateful that she escaped what *might* have been a great evil. Poverty was bitter ; to part with the watch, so precious to her as the legacy of her mother, was one of the bitter parts of her poverty ; but she seemed to recognize at this minute, more fully than she had ever yet done, how much bitterer evils there were to contend with than these.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DOMESTIC ACCOUNTS.



MAKING her tone from Mabel, who returned in considerably better spirits than she had left, Hilda concluded to be satisfied with the result of her sister's visit.

"Fifteen dollars is something, even for a hundred-dollar watch, when it's only *advanced* on it," she remarked, "and it's a good deal for us to have now-a-days. What will it do, Mabel? — I mean how long will it last?"

"Well, to begin with, it will pay for Lilly's medicines, — see! I have brought them along with me, — then it will buy us four dollars' worth of coal, and pay for the hauling and putting in; get half a pound of tea and a pound of sugar for Lilly; and then, by paying half our bill to the grocer and baker, — they will be satisfied with that for a while, — it leaves us enough for bread and potatoes for us all for a week ahead; and still seven

dollars for the coming month's rent, and a few shillings over."

"Is that doing pretty well, Mabel?" Hilda asked, with some doubt in her voice.

"It is doing the best we can, Hilda. I went over it all two or three times as I was coming home, and it doesn't seem to me I can do better."

"The coal will last over four weeks, wont it?"

"Quite four weeks, even if this intense cold continues. Then there will be tea and sugar for Lilly for that long."

"And the rent wont be due for a week, and after that we have a whole month's respite."

"Yes; and that, after all, is the great thing;" and Mabel drew a long breath. "The thought of our landlord having to come to us has been a sort of nightmare to me, Hilda."

"And no wonder! the old skinflint! I'd rather face a mad dog, almost, than have that old Brum-bley come here and the money not ready for him. Anyhow that's a trouble we haven't had yet."

"And we will trust in God we never shall have, Hilda."

"Then Lilly's medicines will last some time, Mabel?"

"Yes, — two weeks, if she gets no worse, poor darling!"

"And bread and potatoes for us all for — for how long did you say?"

"For a week. I shall not count on the few shillings left us either for bread or potatoes, as they will be wanted for something for Lilly."

"Only *one week*, Mabel!" and Hilda looked pale.

"That is all, my sister."

"And *after that*, where are we, Mabel, — *you* scarcely able to get work, and *I* not earning a penny?"

"After that, Hilda, we are in the hands of God, as we are now."

"Yes, of course; but still we must look to ourselves, or else we shall starve."

"We will look to ourselves the best we are able, and leave the rest to Him who provided manna in the wilderness for his people, and sent ravens to feed his prophets."

"Yes, Mabel, I know all about that; but in *these days* miracles aint performed for the best

believers, and I'd rather not depend on the chances."

"All we need can be furnished us without intervention of miracles, Hilda; and I trust it will be. Have more faith, my sister."

"Faith is all very well, Mabel; but I do so crave to feel *certain* of things! Oliver Cromwell didn't have much faith when he said to his soldiers, 'Trust in God, — and *keep your powder dry!*'"

"He had faith, and proved it by those words. He meant that God would only help those who exerted themselves to use the means of aid he placed in their way. *We* keep our powder dry, Hilda, when we strive our best to get work, and, getting it, do it speedily and well, and when we take the best care of the little means that come to our hands. Meanwhile, our trust must be in God; and the firmer our trust, the more he will love and aid us."

"*I* haven't done all I can to keep our powder dry!" suddenly exclaimed Hilda. "What have I been about? I've been a dunce! Here I've been stupidly putting off, and putting off, and dreaming about it, when there's a good turn I might make

that would set us all right in a day,—in an hour !”

Mabel looked in surprise at her sister, who had now risen, and was moving uneasily about the room.

“I can do it !” cried Hilda. “I *can*, and I *will*. A good, bold stroke is the thing needed, and I’ll make it. Yes ! I’ve made up my mind,” she added, suddenly confronting Mabel. “I’ll go, to-morrow, to cousin Algin.”

Mabel gravely shook her head.

“If that be what you propose, Hilda, you may save yourself the trouble,” she said. “Cousin Algin will do nothing for us.”

“How do you know ?” Hilda quickly asked. “You haven’t tried her ?”

“Yes, I have. Knowing that you had not gone to her when you went elsewhere for work, I went, a short time since, myself. I took the watch along, thinking she might be willing to lend me something on it, as it was mother’s. She misunderstood ; before I could get time to explain clearly my purpose, she conceived the impression I had come to—to *beg*. She said it was against her principles to give money ; that if she had happened to

have work, it would have been another thing ; but she hadn't any. Of course, I explained everything, and then she said she was very sorry ; so that is the result of my visit."

"Just like her!" petulantly exclaimed Hilda. "She's a mean, selfish, niggardly woman, and hasn't the soul of a flea. But I'm not going to *beg* of her, Mabel,—the thought of my begging of cousin Algin! No, Mabel, I'm going to *demand* of her ; I'm going to face her out in a way, that, if she has the least spark of conscience left her, will carry my point for me."

"What will you demand, Hilda ? and what is the point you would carry?"

Mabel put the question with considerable uneasiness, regarding the while the excited countenance of her sister.

"I can't tell you, Mabel ; it's my secret, — the same I've had so long, and that I told you once I'd say no more about till the time had come for acting. It hasn't come in the way I hoped yet ; I've not been able to make it come ; but it's full time to try something in the business, and I'm going to begin to-morrow."

"I would rather you wouldn't, Hilda," Mabel said. "You may offend cousin Algin."

"What harm would it do us if she were offended?" rather sharply asked Hilda. "Is she any help to us? or does she feel a snap of her finger for us? For my part, I'd rather have her offended than pleased; though it's not my thought to offend her, and you'll find she's not offended a bit. No, no! that aint cousin Algin. She'll be soft as a cat with her claws covered, and she'll try to fight me off in her sly, cat-like way; but I wouldn't wonder if I were too much for her, for all that. And if I am, O Mabel! what bright, bright days will be coming for us!"

Mabel gravely regarded the speaker. Hilda was the one of her sisters whom she could never wholly understand, and she was at a loss to conjecture now whether she was only giving way to some fanciful whim, or whether she had ground on which to build such expectations as she hinted at.

For a moment Hilda met the look as gravely as it was given, then burst into such a merry laugh as Mabel had not heard from her for long. Catching the latter around the waist, she imprinted a kiss upon either cheek.

"Keep up, Mabel dear! keep up!" she cried. "I'm not the crazy girl you think, but a righty, dighty sane one; and, I tell you, it's all going to come right, now. We'll have back the watch,— we'll have all we need; and we'll know how to enjoy all good things as we never did before."

She kissed her sister again; then took a dancing step or two across the floor, clapping her hands in great delight.

"Kiss me, too, Hilda dear!" said a little voice from the bed. "I love so to hear you laugh! I love to see you kiss Mabel."

"Yes, darling! I didn't know you were awake;" and Hilda hurried to the side of the bed. Bending over the little, pale face, she pressed kiss after kiss upon it.

"I've been awake ever so long," said the child.

"I heard you telling Mabel about good days coming for us, and about *getting back the watch*. I didn't mean to tell Mabel I knew it was gone, and *how* it was gone; but now you say it's coming back again, I'm so glad! I'll miss its tick, tick, over the bed, like anything to-night! For when I'm awake it's such nice company for me, and it

seems to be saying, all the time, 'Mother's watch ! mother's watch !' I love it a good bit better than the sewing-machine, because it's so much quieter in its going, and never makes me feel a throbbing at my back like the sewing-machine does now."

Mabel's eyes filled with tears. She had not thought of the little monitor being missed in this way, and it saddened her.

"We will all be happy to have dear mother's watch back again, Lilly," she said ; "and we *will* have it back ; only we mustn't look for it very, very soon. But it is safe where it is, and we can talk about it till it comes back again."

"Then it wont be to-morrow, Mabel?" in a disappointed tone.

"No, my darling, I fear not possibly so soon as to-morrow."

Lilly sighed. A little, patient sigh it was, and eloquent in expressing how very much to her was the comparatively small matter of the absence of the watch from its accustomed place.

"But it will *tick* all the same, wont it?" she presently asked.

"Yes, darling ; it will tick in its little box, just the same as when it hung over your head."

"I'm glad to hear that!" returned the child. "I'm so glad to know it won't be still, like a dead thing, because it's away from us. And maybe I can fancy I hear it, too; and that will be the next thing to having it here."

"How like you she is, Mabel," said Hilda, "making the best of everything. Dear child! if it were only to get back the watch for her little fancies, I'd face cousin Algin to-morrow with a lion's heart! But it's for more than that, — a good deal more, and I'll never flinch from it. You'll see how I'll 'keep my powder dry,' Mabel, — you'll see!"

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW HILDA KEEPS HER POWDER DRY.



T an early hour of the following morning, Hilda presented herself at the residence of Mrs. Kingsley. That lady was in her sitting-room, and, at her request, Hilda was shown in to her.

"I knew you'd come to see me at last, Hilda," she said, coming forward pleasantly to meet her. "I was telling Mabel, the other day, that, with all your odd freakishness, you're such a good girl at heart, that I was sure you wouldn't be ugly with me long."

"I'm a straight up-and-down girl, cousin Algin, if I'm nothing else," gravely replied Hilda; "and so I think it's but right to say that, coming in the way I do, I don't feel I ought to take your hand. If you'd give it to me after a bit, — I mean when I'm going, — and in the way I'd like, I'd be right pleased to take it."

"There is but one way I know of to give and take a hand, Hilda," mildly rejoined the lady, "and that is in kindness and good-understanding."

"I can't be a hypocrite, cousin Algin," said the young girl. "I've come to you on business that will be anything but pleasant to you, and I must say so."

Mrs. Kingsley opened wide her pale gray eyes, — with no look of offence, however, — at the plain-spoken manner of her visitor.

"And what, pray, may this business be?" she asked.

"Can you not guess, cousin Algin?"

"I might guess it is on the errand Mabel came the other day," was the reply, "only it's not like you, — you're so high-spirited."

"No more is it like Mabel," quickly returned Hilda. "She told you you were mistaken, — that she didn't come to *beg*. She wanted work, cousin Algin, — work that she'd have toiled over day and night, thinking nothing of the sacrifice of rest and health, mind you! — thinking of nothing but the making of a little money to keep off starvation from us all, but mostly from our poor, suffering Lilly, who is, this day, as helpless as when a

babe in the arms. Then she thought, maybe you'd give her a little money on mother's watch, so she needn't take it to a stranger; for it was needful money should come *somehow*."

"Yes, poor girl! she explained to me about the watch," said Mrs. Kingsley; "and it really made me feel extremely sad. But, since it had to be done, it was as well it should be in the hands of a stranger as in mine. With *me*, it could have been no matter of business, but of charity, — no, not *charity*, but assistance; and when I do anything of that sort, I like it to stand under its own name."

"There would have been nothing like charity about it, cousin Algin," said Hilda, warmly. "Had the money lent not been returned, the watch would have been yours."

"It wouldn't have done, my dear," mildly returned Mrs. Kingsley, "and for reasons that I will not hurt your feelings by mentioning. And, to be frank with you, Hilda, — which I know is what you like, — I was much surprised at learning Mabel was in such difficulty. It appears to me, even with all possible allowance made for her youth and inexperience, that there must be some unhappy

leaning to extravagance, since she has not done better with the fair start she had. Your poor father had somewhat this leaning in his youth, and it doesn't seem impossible it may have descended to his children."

"Mabel extravagant!" exclaimed Hilda, "Surely, cousin Algin, you cannot think it! There are few, even years older than she is, who could have made out so well under such difficulties."

"I don't mean anything unkind of Mabel," rejoined the cousin, "for I think her a most estimable young woman. Still it can't be denied she has made little of the advantages she has had; that place at the sewing-machine rooms, for instance, with eight and nine dollars a week."

"That place would have enabled her to keep herself and little Lilly in decent comforts, cousin Algin; but you know how she lost it. Through that terrible accident to poor Lilly, she had to give up everything, for a time, but attending to her. But, even after that, Mabel could have done well if she'd been able to get plenty of work and at decent prices. But, poor girl! it's been a hard struggle for her all the time."

"The struggle wasn't helped by your adding one to the family, Hilda. So far as I can learn, you have not been making your expenses to Mabel."

"But I've tried my best, and Mabel knows it," said Hilda, her face flushing. "And *she* never said anything like what you've said, cousin Algin, for it's not like her."

"She didn't say it. I merely gathered it from her answers to my questions. I referred to the fact simply to remind you how much better it would have been to keep a good home when you had it, Hilda. I did my best to keep my promise made to your dear mother, and you cannot justly say you had cause to leave me."

"I *can* justly say it, cousin Algin; and it is to talk about that very thing I've come to-day, — only what you said about Mabel being extravagant put me off of it for a time."

"I've been thinking a good deal about little Lilly since Mabel's telling me how poorly she is," interrupted Mrs. Kingsley, looking across Hilda's shoulder to the clock on the mantel; "and, as I've been wanting to come and see her, I'd return with you now, only I have an engagement with a

friend, which I cannot possibly put off. It is very near eleven now, and she will be looking for me."

Hilda made not the slightest movement to go, though she well understood the lady's hint.

"I thought to have been through with all I had to say, by this time," she remarked, "but cannot leave, cousin Algin, till it is said. I want to tell you why I went away from you three months ago. Do you remember the evening of the fourth of July, when you walked with cousin Hugh in the garden? I was in the summer-house, — you didn't know, — and I *heard every word that you said.*"

Hilda watched Mrs. Kingsley's countenance closely, as she said these words. She believed she saw a paling of her features, and a trembling of the hand which rested on the back of the lounge where her cousin sat; but the room was shaded by heavy window-curtains, and the flickering of the fire-light might readily have deceived her. Indeed, as the young girl had positively made up her mind that her communication must cause considerable emotion to her auditor, it was not surprising if her fancy misled her to any point.

"And what did you hear child?" asked her cousin, in a tone that betrayed no agitation, whatever she might have felt. "So far as I remember, there was nothing said which you or any one else might not have heard."

"You talked about *the paper*, cousin Algin! So, I know the whole story,—I know enough to *demand* right and justice at your hand and at cousin Hugh's for father's children, almost starving for food,—his baby, Lilly, needing even the pure air which is life, and the only chance of life, for her. Before I left home, cousin Algin, I said I *would* demand this justice of you; but I now humbly *ask* it only, giving you a chance to do this good and sensible thing of your own free will. O cousin! cousin! think of us three poor girls this cold, dreary day, suffering and friendless. Think of the bright Christmas time coming, yet no Christmas for us. Think of the unhappy time poor Mabel has gone through since dear mother's death, toiling her young life away, losing health and strength; and for what? Why, far as herself goes, for merely the crust to eat, the poor roof over her head, a little fire to keep from

freezing, and almost rags to cover her! Think of our little Lilly confined to a bed of suffering, with scarcely the comforts necessary to keep body and soul together; think what agony to dear Mabel to have no power to give her such things as would, in part, at least, make her time less wearisome and less miserable. Think, I say, of all this, cousin Algin, and *knowing what you know*, how, if things were as they should be, we would this day have plenty and to spare, — do a simple act of right to those so nearly connected with you! The past shall be forgotten, cousin; we will receive at your hands, almost as a gift, what has been so long withheld, and what you can so well spare; we will receive it, thankfully, gratefully."

Hilda had risen while speaking, and stood before her cousin, tears streaming over her cheeks, and that pleading in her gestures which expressed itself in her words and tone. A strange contrast to the excitement of the young girl was presented by the appearance and bearing of the lady, as she sat in the corner of her

lounge, an expression of surprise on her features, nothing more.

"Strange, infatuated girl!" she said, looking with something like pity upon her young cousin, "how completely have fancy and your strange temper carried you away! What quirk has taken possession of you, I cannot even imagine; but, if you do not quickly become more rational, you are likely to pass for one bereft of reason. Hilda, my dear! I am your friend,—much as you seem to doubt it,—and my advice to you is good. Go home quietly to Mabel, and keep yourself composed as possible for the remainder of the day. See no one else, talk to no one else, while you are in this strange condition. Mabel is sensible, she is rational, she would never encourage an outbreak like this."

While Mrs. Kingsley spoke, Hilda had made a great effort for composure, and it was in a voice almost as calm as her cousin's own she now said, —

"Then, cousin, you refuse to do us this act of justice; you will see us struggling on, as in the past; you will look quietly on while

worse days than we have yet known come for us!"

"You have put it out of my power to aid you in any way, Hilda. I will not have it said I was threatened into charity by a crazy girl."

Hilda's forced composure was at an end. It was with flashing eyes she now confronted her cousin.

"You don't think me crazy," she said; "you know this minute, I'm sane as girl ever was. And, cousin Algin, since you will not give us what is our own, it shall be given us by the hand of the law. Go home, you say, and see no one but patient, enduring Mabel! On the contrary, I leave you to make my statement to one of the first lawyers of this city; and before night the first step will probably be taken toward obliging you to a simple act of decency and right."

"You will be stigmatized as a mad woman, miserable girl!" returned Mrs. Kingsley. "What lawyer in his senses will credit so absurd a statement as you seem to hint at?"

"Any will, — all must," replied Hilda. "Oh

yes, they must! It is the truth, and truth will speak for itself. And, cousin Algin, how have you courage to stand boldly by falsehood — a falsehood that robs poor orphans of their heritage? You have four little children, the same number that, with us, God has seen fit to leave without parents and friends. Do you not fear that, in his retributive justice, he may put a blight upon *your* children; that he may deprive them of father and mother, and throw them friendless and penniless upon a cold world? or do you not fear he may take *them* from *you* one by one, leaving you to see, when too late, that you have parted with them for gold. God has said he will ‘visit the sins of the fathers upon the children,’ cousin Algin; and so surely as you persevere in this great wrong, he will visit it upon those you prize most dearly. Oh, yes, he will do it!”

Mrs. Kingsley had risen, and her manner denoted an impatience which was surely to put an end to this strange interview. But her cheek was very pale, and there was no longer doubt that she trembled.

“You must leave me, Hilda,” she said; “I

have strong nerves, but I really cannot bear more of this excited language. Most persons would be unforgivingly incensed at a young girl taking with them such a tone as this; but I can only pity you, — pity you sincerely. Go home, my poor girl! A little reflection will, I trust, bring you to reason. I am not at all angry with you, Hilda, not at all; I only pity you, — pity you from my heart."

Hilda walked to the door. With her hand upon the knob, she turned once more to her cousin.

"I have made up my mind what to do, cousin Algin," she said, "but only if I'm driven to it. Will you take a day to talk over the matter with cousin Hugh? He may think differently about it from what you do."

Mrs. Kingsley smiled, as she might have smiled on the folly of a little child.

"I would willingly take a day to consult with my husband," she replied; "but not in the way you propose; and to let you think so will be to fix you more unhappily in your strange hallucinations. If you are bent on

rushing madly to your own exposure, you must do so; I cannot stay you."

"The exposure wont touch *me*, cousin Algin; and besides, I'm only a poor sewing-girl that goes through a good deal. When it touches persons of the high respectability of cousin Hugh Kingsley and his wife, why, of course, it is quite another thing."

With these words, delivered with an odd mixture of humility and dignity, Hilda closed herself out in the hall, and in a minute after had quitted her cousin's house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A LEGAL FRIEND.



HILDA had no thought of returning home until her purpose of the morning was accomplished. It was no vain threat she had made to her cousin, and she proceeded forthwith to put it into execution, well satisfied that this second visit would accomplish all she had so far failed in.

She had no difficulty in determining what legal gentleman to consult, — a certain Mr. Dunfield, an old friend of her father's, being the person she considered most suitable.

Mr. Dunfield was home, and received her in his private office. He remembered her well, and spoke to her kindly ; so much so that Hilda, encouraged to speak freely, had in a few minutes poured forth her tale to his ear.

The gentleman listened with much apparent in-

terest, not offering interruption by a word even of question.

“ I know nothing about lawyers’ fees, Mr. Dunfield,” said Hilda, in conclusion, “ and have nothing to pay you with now ; but, when the matter of this paper is settled, you may name what you choose and it will be thankfully given you.”

“ So far as that is concerned, my dear young lady,” very gravely replied Mr. Dunfield, “ there is no need of a word. I held your lamented father in high esteem, and would be pleased to do something for his children. But I fear, in this matter you bring to me, you entertain hopes that can never be realized. There are certain points in your relation which we will go over quietly together, for your better understanding of my meaning. In the first place, your ear may have deceived you concerning the conversation between your cousins ; in the second, if any such conversation took place, and they see fit to deny it, there is nothing but your bare assertion against theirs, and that will avail you nothing. We have no right in law to look into your cousin Kingsley’s private papers, and without doing so, it is quite impossible to prove whether any such paper as you speak of exists. As the matter

now stands, therefore, I am sorry to say, my young friend, we can do nothing, — positively nothing.”

A shade of disappointment had fallen on the countenance of poor Hilda.

“I am quite sure my ears did not deceive me,” she said. “I heard every word that passed, just as I heard you speaking just now, Mr. Dunfield. When I heard cousin Hugh say the paper was still with the package of letters I made up my mind to have it. One night I managed by close watching to get the key of his secretary ; and, when all were in bed, I slipped down to the library where the secretary was. I got it open and looked well for the letters. I knew the appearance of them well enough, for I had often seen them in my father’s own desk. But they were not there. If they *had* been, by daybreak next morning the paper would have been in your hands.”

“Poor child ! and so you really tried for it ? ”

In Mr. Dunfield’s look of pity Hilda believed she read confirmation of her cousin’s assurance concerning the exposure of her suspicions laying her open to the charge of insanity.

“I certainly did try for it, sir,” she rejoined, meeting his eye with a look in her own which she

believed must reassure him. "It was a great venture for a young girl to make ; but then I had much to embolden me. It was a rightful inheritance of which we were deprived by those who should have been our best friends. Beside that we were poor. The worst thing I saw in our poverty then was our being separated, when we could all have been so much happier together. My eldest sister was working hard for herself and little Lilly ; Minnie was not happy with Mrs. Lemming ; and I, — well, I was anything but happy with cousin Algin Kingsley."

"Your want of content at your cousin's was probably the origin of your strange fancy," observed Mr. Dunfield.

He had here spoken his thoughts, forgetting their probable impression on his young visitor, but was quickly brought to a consciousness of his mistake by the look in Hilda's eye. It expressed not so much mortification at his entire doubt of her statement, as it did the rebellious and readily excited temper peculiar to her.

"Mr. Dunfield !" she said, "so surely as you sit before me this thing is exactly as I have stated it to you. It is a very strange affair certainly. It

is strange that persons like my cousins would act the part they have done, and toward four unoffending girls ; and I suppose, too, hearing it this way, and from me, the most natural conclusion for you to come to is that I am mad. But it is a great mistake, for all that ; and, if we both live, we will see the time when all is made clear. Then, Mr. Dunfield, you will remember this day, and my coming to you with the strange story, and — and my going away the broken-hearted girl I am.”

While speaking, Hilda had risen to go ; and, at the concluding words, — scarcely less to her own surprise than that of Mr. Dunfield, — she burst into a passion of tears. Her trial of a while back with Mrs. Kingsley had left her nervous and irritable, and this unlooked-for disappointment quite upset her little remaining self-possession.

Now Mr. Dunfield was a kind-hearted man, with daughters, too, of his own, and his concern was sincere upon witnessing the distress of his young visitor. In the kindest manner possible he endeavored to soothe her. But Hilda was in no mood to be soothed ; though still less was she disposed to continue giving way to feeling as she had done. By a great effort she checked her tears, as

suddenly as she had yielded to them ; and, in a manner different from any she had yet shown, she said, —

“ I’m sorry, — very sorry, Mr. Dunfield, that I have taken up so much of your time, and to so little purpose. No girl could be more ignorant than I was of everything connected with law, and that is the only excuse I have to make. I’m sure I’m very much indebted for your hearing of my story and acting so kindly ; so now I will bid you good-morning.”

Mr. Dunfield gently took both her hands in his own.

“ I wish I could do something for you, my child,” he said ; “ and if any opportunity occurs, in which a legal friend may find room to work, come to me, and I will aid you. I had great regard for your father, and would be happy to do something for you.”

The tone in which these words were spoken touched Hilda, notwithstanding the little spirit of resentment which had so unreasonably come over her, and it was all she could do to control her feelings, as she replied in a few words of thanks, and left the office

It was misery to the poor girl to know that she had not in store even the consolation for her disappointment of Mabel's sympathy ; for she did not intend yet to take to her confidence her elder sister. She did not despair of final success regarding what she considered the righting of herself and her sisters, though, after her double disappointment of the morning, no plan for the furthering of it suggested itself to her. It was rather a vague belief in all " sometime coming right," which upheld her ; and she strove to give this belief, as much as possible, the coloring of that faith in the working of a wise Providence, which she thought so beautiful in Mabel.

" If Mabel knew all I know," she said to herself, as she wended her way home, " she'd say, ' God will surely bring all round in his own time. He will not let the doers of a great wrong go unpunished, nor the innocent suffer forever.' And she'd say, too, ' That God may the sooner bring about a thing which will shorten the time of our suffering, let us petition him for the kindness, He will hear us, — he will pity us.' Well, there's the mistake I've made. Have I had God in my mind when I've thought of this business of cousin

Algin? Have I prayed to him night and morning to bring about a discovery of that paper, or to soften cousin Algin's or cousin Hugh's heart, so that they'd do justice to us poor girls, even now? No! I've been thinking all the time of some great thing *I'd* do, yet never asked *Him* to help me! I've overlooked, like a wicked and silly girl, as I am, how completely everything, great and little, is in his hands, and obeys his ordering only. *He* can do it, and without the intervention of a miracle, as Mabel says; and I'll set my heart to the humbly asking of him."

It was a very cold day; and the changes Hilda had experienced from her stay in the warm room of her cousin Algin and the office of Mr. Dunfield to the street had chilled her considerably. She hurried along, therefore, fast as she could, urged to rapid motion, also, by the fact that a fall of snow, which had commenced during her stay in Mr. Dunfield's office, made her uneasy for her dress, — that excellent merino, the gift of her cousin, which she had put on for the occasion of her visit. Still, with all this hurry, it was full twenty minutes before she found herself in the neighborhood of her home.

At about a hundred yards from the house, was a carpenter-shop, and before the door of this shop she perceived, as she approached, the figure of a woman, her black dress and bonnet quite covered with snow. An old basket stood on the ground beside her, and, from among the heaps of half-buried shavings about the front of the shop, she was busily engaged in picking up chips.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FIRST-FLOOR LODGER.



S Hilda was about to pass this woman, the latter glanced up at her, and within the old black bonnet, the young girl recognized the face of the first-floor lodger of the house in which she and her sisters had the upper room.

This woman had only occupied the apartment referred to for a short time back, it having previously been the workroom of an humble boot-maker. Until the present moment, no chance had brought the first and second floor lodgers in contact, though the person of the old woman was not unknown to Hilda and her sister, they having several times observed her from their window, going from and returning to her home.

Pausing in her occupation, the woman gave a nod of recognition and a "good morning" to *Hilda*; both of which the latter returned in the

same friendly way they were bestowed. Hilda would then have passed on, but that her new acquaintance followed up her salutation with a request that she would give her the aid of her arm to the house, saying that her lameness — she was something of a cripple — troubled her more than common this morning. The young arm was readily placed at her disposal ; and in this way the two arrived at the house together, — the old woman's tongue running quite briskly during their short walk.

“ We must get better acquainted,” said the latter, as they reached and entered the door. “ Why can't you come in a bit and talk with me now ? I like young girls, and I'm all alone, you know.”

Hilda felt a little put out at the proposal, for she was in no humor for a visit, especially to a stranger ; but a glance at the pale, withered face of her companion stayed the refusal on her lips.

“ I will come in for a very little bit,” she replied ; “ but I've been from home some time, and must return to my sisters.”

“ Ah ! don't I want to hear all about you and your sisters ? ” rejoined the woman, who had now led the way into her room. Here, a good fire was

burning, contrary to the expectation of Hilda, who had received the impression that the newly-gathered chips were for the purpose of starting one. The first-floor lodger seemed to understand the thought of her visitor, as the eye of the latter fell upon the bright fire-light ; for, as she set her basket aside in a corner, she remarked, —

“ I’m not so silly, you see, as to wait, like some, to gather my chips till I want them. If I did, where would be the good fire to warm me when I come in from the gathering ? ”

“ But, not wanting them, I wonder you went out in the snow to gather them,” returned Hilda, accepting the seat by the fire offered her by her hostess.

“ It don’t differ much now, snow, rain, or dry,” was the rejoinder. “ It comes all one to a body, toughened up, as I am. Besides this, I saw the snow was likely to be a long one, and the chips would be getting deeper covered up every hour. But that’s not what I want to talk about,” she added, “ but about you and your sisters. I’ve been watching you two pretty sharp, for it’s a sort of company to me, living so all alone, to be noticing the ways of them about me. Now I saw you

when you went out this morning, — I saw you turn back, after you got off from the door, and give a look up at the window. Then I knew your sister was there looking after you. I felt bad, too, for a while, thinking how there was no one to look after *me*, and how there hadn't been for years, and how, for all that, I came from a bigger family of sisters than one often meets with ; but changes, you see, and growing poor and old, — but it's you and your sisters I want to talk about," she said, a second time checking the disposition to ramble in her discourse. "When you looked up at the window, you had such a look on your face as made me sure you were after something that seemed big and hopeful to you ; and I thought to myself, 'That black-haired one's got pluck enough in her for two well-grown women ; she's more in her, and can bear a sight more than the pale-faced one.' But how then's this ? You came back looking almost pale as *her*, for all your bright looks a while ago. Now thinks I, when I see you, 'She's met with some trouble, this black-haired one, and I'd like, more than a little, to know what it is.' And why shouldn't I, dearie ? It's sometimes a comfort, just the telling what's on

one's mind ; and if you'd tell me what's wrong, right up and down, you'd find I have a heart to feel for you, though I am but a miserable old woman."

Hilda would have found it difficult to explain what there was about her new acquaintance which awakened her confidence ; and perhaps, indeed, she was influenced by nothing more than the wish to talk freely to some one ; but, before she had well thought what she was doing, the story of her visits of the morning were poured forth to the ear of her listener. Whether the latter clearly understood who was "cousin Algin," and who the "Mr. Dunfield," who played such important parts in the relation, it is impossible to say ; but her ready sympathy was awakened for the young girl, who told her story with such impetuosity of feeling, and, upon its conclusion, she expressed her conviction that these parties had severally acted very badly, especially regarding the point of the young narrator's sanity, which she, — Mrs. Moppit, — declared to be untouched, beyond shadow of doubt.

In the progress of the story there naturally *came out* the peculiar trials under which the

upper-room lodgers were suffering, the difficulty of procuring work, the unhappy condition of poor little Lilly, and the loss of time incurred by Hilda herself through the injury to her hand,—this loss of time being a particular matter of regret because it had resulted in the loss of her place in the sail-loft. Hilda spoke of the patient and cheerful submission of Mabel to the hard tasks imposed on her through poverty and the afflictions of the little Lilly.

“You think I have so much in me, and that I can bear more than my sister,” she said; “but that is because you don’t know Mabel. She looks as delicate as though a strong wind might blow her away; but she’s so stout of heart, and so steady in her faith in all good things, that she can stand up bravely to a thing that knocks me off my feet. Where *I* complain, or cry, or get angry, *she* sits quietly down and thinks the trouble over; and though her face grows paler, and her eyes get to have more and more that look of being fixed on something far off,—something she’s not a bit afraid to look at, though,—she grows, with every day, stronger to bear and forbear.”

"She's a good girl," returned the first-floor lodger, "and I warrant you she's happier this minute than many a one that gets plenty of what's called the good things of this life."

In return for the communication made herself, Mrs. Moppit confided to her young visitor some particulars of her past and present life. She had had many friends in her younger days, she said, but one only remained to her now. This was a person in whose family she had been nurse, and whose interest in her continued unshaken through the lapse of years.

"I nursed her baby," she said, "and I helped nurse her husband in his last illness. Well, from the time he was gone, she settled her heart on the child in a way I never yet saw even a mother do. If that child had lived, Barbara Strand would have been most like, a different woman than she is at this day; for though her heart's all right as heart can be, and she's always wanting to do good, there's such a running of her head on past times and past troubles, that the good she wants to do slips away from her. Though it's not me ought to say that, neither, for, come what may, she stands to helping

me. If it wasn't for her, I'd have no roof over my head, or a bit to eat or put on me, this day. But then, I nursed her child, and she can't forget *that*, because it's the point she's always turning on. That poor little girl was the best part of three years dying, and all the time the mother a hoping it would yet be up again ; but the bad turn came at last, and, after that, there was no more hope in this life for Barbara Strand."

Hilda heard the story to its conclusion, though, certainly, not with her mind upon it ; for an ugly, remorseful feeling was at her heart, reminding her how long had been her stay from the presence of her sisters. Soon as, with good feeling to her hostess, she could do so, she hurried to leave her.

"Come see me again," said Mrs. Moppit, as the door was about to close on her. "I'd like to come up and see you and your sister and the sick child, only I can't, because of the steepness of the stairs for my lame foot."

Hilda made the best she could of her disappointments of the morning to Mabel. As the latter had looked for nothing favorable as the result of her sister's visit to Mrs. Kingsley, she was neither surprised nor chagrined that it had ended in ~~noth-~~

ing satisfactory. As regarded her visit to Mr. Dunfield, Hilda made no communication whatever. *That* visit touched on her secret, and might possibly prove a clue to it. She did tell, however, how she had made acquaintance with their first-floor lodger, and how the visit to her which followed had delayed her return to her sister's room. It is needless to say, Hilda saw fit to withhold the confidence regarding her cousin Algin's affair, which she had thoughtlessly reposed in Mrs. Mop-pit. She was too far from approving her conduct in that particular herself to believe it possible it could meet the approbation of the more prudent Mabel.

Desirous to hide from Mabel how much she was impressed by her ill success of the morning, she affected a cheerfulness she did not feel, speaking hopefully of the new efforts she was to make on the morrow to procure work for them both.

"Now that the doctor says I can use my hand freely, I don't feel so badly about how things are going with us, Mabel," she said. "If I can get any work at all, I shall do as well as I did at the old sail-loft; and if I'd got a place there again, it might only have ended in my getting another hurt.

I somehow feel as though to-morrow were going to bring it all right."

Whatever ground Hilda may have had for her hopes, it did not prove fallacious ; for, by early the next afternoon, she had a tolerably good supply of vests for Mabel and a still better one of shirts for herself. At the latter she designed to work on such occasions as Mabel was not in use of the sewing-machine.

She found more opportunities so to employ herself than she had expected, Mabel being at little leisure for sewing on account of Lilly becoming alarmingly worse. Except while under the influence of soothing drugs, the child was for several days in constant pain. The doctor had given Mabel to understand that such changes as these were to be looked for ; yet her distress was so great that she could not rest satisfied till Hilda had brought him to the little sufferer. To her question whether he could think of no new remedy, he replied that there was no relief to be found but in morphine, and that she must considerably enlarge the doses.

Under his direction, too, she found, that by watching the symptoms of her little patient, she could, in a measure, anticipate the spells of more

acute suffering, and retard them by the medicine.

At such times as, soothed by this, little Lilly lay in a condition of comparative ease, Mabel would repair to her sewing-machine, and make what progress she could at her work. It was becoming more particularly needful she should soon accomplish something at this, as the increased indisposition of the child was making inroads upon the seven dollars laid by for the coming rent-day.

Poor girl ! in making up her account for the expenditure of the fifteen dollars procured upon her watch, she had not foreseen this unhappy change in the condition of her little charge. Though, as she said to herself now, had she foreseen it, what difference could she have made, except in not parting with quite so much at the one time for her coal ?

It was the afternoon of the fourth day of little Lilly's attack, and the child lay in partial relief from suffering, the hand of Mabel clasped in her own. But for this affectionate hold, Mabel would have been at her work ; for, in getting some of her vests completed by the afternoon of the following Monday, lay all her hope of making up, even in

part, the deficit of her rent-money in time to prevent the house-agent coming after it.

Mabel had for some time looked upon the closed eyes of the little Lilly, with the half-formed resolve to slip away her hand and repair to her sewing-machine before she finally made the move to do so. At the first attempt, however, to disengage herself, the child's eyes partly unclosed, and a little murmur of complaint issued from the pale lips. Then Mabel knew that Lilly was not so soundly sleeping, but that she was quite conscious of having her hand in her own, and would not renew the attempt to leave her.

"I shall get some time yet at my shirts," remarked Hilda, who, from her place before the sewing-machine, had been observant of what was passing; "and, though it don't tell nearly so well as your work, Mabel,—I shall make just seven cents apiece on these shirts,—it's better than nothing being done."

"It is time I should take your place," returned her sister; "yet I can't bear to leave the poor child. Dear little Lilly! if it be a comfort to her to have me by her, I cannot deprive her of it."

Faintly as the words were spoken, they were

evidently heard by the little girl ; for, half-opening her eyes, she fixed them lovingly upon her faithful nurse, then, reclosing them, gave a slight pressure of her sister's hand, and released it.

“ How kind and good is my little Lilly ! ” whispered Mabel, and she bent to press a kiss upon the child's lips before leaving her.

At that moment there came a slight knock at the door of the room. So unusual a circumstance startled the two girls ; and, in place of rising to open to the applicant, they retained their seats, exchanging a rather uneasy glance.

It certainly was not the doctor, for he had left them not very long before ; neither could it be that dreaded person, the landlord, for happily his rent was not yet due. There was little time for conjecture who else it might possibly be, for very soon upon the knock followed the opening of the door, and slowly upon this the entrance of a person quite unknown to the inhabitants of the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE VISITOR OF THE FIRST-FLOOR LODGER.



HE individual who thus took the sisters by surprise was a woman of some forty-five or fifty years of age, comfortably, though not very well dressed, in mourning, — short of stature, and very spare in face and form. Her thin gray hair was tucked beneath a white cap, the border of which showed within the roomy face of a bonnet singularly large even for the fashion of the day. Indeed, taken in comparison with the proportions of the wearer, this head-covering bordered on the grotesque, and gave to her whole appearance so quaint a character as might very naturally create a smile in the observer. The smile was not likely to be repeated, however, after a glance into the face of the woman, whose pale features, delicate in form, wore an expression of melancholy and of patient resignation touching to see.

One would say there was there some long-ago wakened, but never-to-be-forgotten grief, that had absorbed to itself the inner life of the woman, leaving but a passive and but half-conscious machine, to move its remaining time on earth, having no commingling with others save in a sympathy with that grief,—seeing all things through it, feeling all things through it.

Having paused only to close the door behind her, the stranger walked slowly and silently forward, her eyes earnestly fixed upon Mabel, as the latter still sat beside the bed of little Lilly. Surprise at the unexpected appearance of their visitor kept both the young girls silent, and it was the former who first spoke.

“I am visitor to the first-floor lodger,” she quietly said, turning from Mabel to Hilda and back, with one or two old-fashioned nods, “and I’ve just come up a moment to see the little sick child.”

Having thus briefly introduced herself and the purpose of her visit, she glided with noiseless step to the side of the bed opposite Mabel, and fixed her regards on the pale but beautiful features of the little, afflicted one.

Hilda brought forward a chair, and both she and

Mabel desired the stranger to be seated. She took no notice, however, of the proffered attention, but continued to gaze on the touching picture before her; and Mabel and Hilda presently perceived large tear-drops to fall from under her lowered lids and over her cheeks.

"Poor little darling!" she half-whispered, as though to herself. "Beautiful little sufferer! how like death she looks, only for the pain-lines that tell she has not yet on her angel robe. A little while more to bear the pain,—a little while more to grieve yet comfort mother's heart, and she is gone to Him who sent her,—back to light,—back to rest and peace."

The words fell on Mabel's ear like a requiem,—almost like a prophetic warning. She turned her eyes from the face of her strange visitor to the beautiful, fading form so dear to her, then covered her face and silently wept. For Hilda, she looked for a moment as though about to resent the intrusion of the stranger; but sight of the unmistakable emotion on the sad features of the woman recalled her to different feelings.

"You had better take a seat," she said, putting

the before-offered chair a little nearer ; “ you look too tired and weak to be standing.”

The stranger looked a grateful acknowledgment, but did not avail herself of the chair.

“ It’s a picture I have before me always,” she said, absently resuming her own train of thought, — “ a poor fading babe on its bed of pain, and a sad, heart-crushed mother watching beside it. But God is with them both. He gives the mother a little hope to the last ; and, when he takes away the babe, he gives her instead a sweetly sad remembrance that is like a shadow of the little one’s self. He wont forget the mother in her time, neither ; but will surely give her babe to her again. Who can doubt his goodness ? — I never can ! I know my babe will be given back to me, — more beautiful, more loving than ever ; and when I’m most lonely, its just then he makes me feel the more the good time coming. And I take comfort, and am able to move on again ; and so I’ll go moving on, and moving on the best I’m able, till he calls me to himself, and puts back my babe in my arms, — and for all time, — for all eternity.”

There was no room for question of the grief *which* had set its life-mark on the sad woman ; her

every word and look in presence of the stricken child spoke it.

Seeing that Mabel was still in no condition to speak, Hilda thought it incumbent on herself to say something ; though the peculiar manner of their visitor embarrassed her as to how she should again address her.

“ The little girl is our sister,” she presently said ; “ but Mabel is every bit as tender and loving as a mother to her. Your words have made her feel badly, but she will presently talk to you. You say you came to see the first-floor lodger ? I suppose she told you about our poor little Lilly ? ”

The stranger turned her eyes upon the young girl, at first with a look of dreamy semi-consciousness, which caused some misgivings in the mind of Hilda. But this look passed away, and it was only the customary expression of quiet sadness which remained upon the features.

“ Yes, I came to see Mrs. Moppit,” she said, — “ Mrs. Moppit on the first-floor, and she told me about the little one ; so I took the liberty of coming up.”

She turned again to the bed.

“ It’s a pretty, but a sad picture ! ” she said,

after a short silence. "But I never turn from it as some do, — I know it all so well. I know it from first to last, — from the first fear entering the mother's heart to the last hope leaving it. And I know, too, how after that there's much, — oh, much to come that's hardest of all to bear, and that the heart scarcely *could* bear but for God's presence in it. "Well, well! I'm glad I came up; and, if you'll let me, I'll come again; for I shan't forget the pretty, sad picture of the young mother and her suffering babe."

"The poor little girl and her sister," said Hilda again. "Our mother has been dead these nearly two years."

"Ah, well! it's all the same," said the visitor. "Mother, or sister-mother, it's still the tender nurse, with the mother's heart, the mother's hope, and — the mother's reward." Laying her hand gently on Mabel's shoulder, she added, "God be with you, young sister-mother! And he will be with you through all. No cup he gives to drink but has its sweet drop, so that we take it in submission to his will. Something, too, of the sweet joy of the angels must come to those who tend the angels; it is so in heaven; it is so on earth. From

among the roses we carry away the sweet odor of the roses. Loving them, one learns to love all things pure."

She bent down and kissed Mabel's half-covered brow, as the head of the latter rested on the edge of the bed.

"May I kiss *her*, too?" she then asked, bending over little Lilly. "I wouldn't disturb her for the kiss, but it would be sweet to me!"

Hilda could only nod assent, for she was now no better able to speak than Mabel herself; and the lips of the first-floor visitor touched those of the slumbering child.

Lilly's eyes opened and fixed themselves upon the face bent over her; but without the faintest expression of alarm, scarcely one of surprise.

"Who is it?" she asked. "Is it a good angel, Mabel? — is it *mother*?"

The stranger turned away her face to wipe her eyes.

"I have not shed a tear for long," she said; "but the voice and look of the child recall times when I *could* weep. Yes, sweet babe," she added, bending again over the pillow; "it is *a mother*, and one that would be an angel to you if she *could*."

For your sake," and she looked to Mabel, "I could wish to be an angel of health and life to the little one; for her own, — not so, — not so."

"Oh, that you were!" sobbed Mabel. "I know what you mean; yet, if I had my choice, I could never, never give her up!"

"You're young, and you don't know," said the stranger, turning to leave. "*I* felt so once; but it was long, very long ago. Shall I come again, young sister-mother?" looking once more to Mabel.

"Yes, — oh, yes!" Mabel replied.

"I have made you shed tears."

"Yes; but they have done me good. I strive too much against them, perhaps; at least, I feel so, at times like this, when they bring me relief."

"I will come."

She gave another wistful glance to the bed, then, with a grave nod to Mabel and Hilda, left the room as quietly as she had entered it.

"Say, who is it, Mabel dear?" again asked Lilly, who, with her eyes, had followed the stranger until the door closed upon her.

"We don't know, my darling; she didn't tell us her name."

“ But she’s good ;— a good angel, didn’t she say ? ”

“ She said she was visitor to the first-floor lodger,” put in Hilda, who happening to be in one of her prosaic moods, chose things should be called by their right names.

“ Visitor to the first-floor lodger ? o—h ! ” said Lilly, in a disappointed tone. “ But I think, Hilda, she’s very good, if she *is* only that. I think she’s *good* enough to be an angel.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Work — work — work,
In the dull December light."

EFORE this little talk came to an end, Mabel had arranged her sewing-machine, and commenced working on her vests.

Recently put under the influence of a large dose of morphine, and with her mind diverted through the novel occurrence of the visit of the stranger, Lilly continued for some hours without return of her more acute suffering, and Mabel was thus little interrupted during the remainder of the evening.

Through the long night-hours she worked steadily on, having administered another dose to the child, and the gray of morning, rendering dim and rayless her lamp, found her still busily employed. Overtasked nature would then bear no more, and she threw herself on the bed, where she was presently in a sound slumber.

When Hilda waked at the customary hour, she

found Mabel still sleeping. In opposition to directions given her by the latter, instead of waking her, she took every care to avoid breaking the rest which she knew was so much needed, busying herself, as quietly as possible, in getting ready the simple breakfast.

“You’ll give me some eggs for breakfast, Hilda?” whispered Lilly, who, contrary to Hilda’s expectation, had wakened without complaint.

“There’s not an egg in the basket, darling,” Hilda replied, having looked into the receptacle mentioned.

“But I want some,” rejoined the child, a little fretfully. “I haven’t had an egg for ever so long, — and to-morrow’s Christmas.”

“You haven’t been well enough to eat them, dear Lilly.”

“Yes, but I’m better now, and I want eggs ever so much! Mabel will send you for some when she wakes, I know. She always *does* let me have eggs when I want them.”

Hilda said nothing further. She was thinking of eggs at forty-five cents a dozen, and wondering whether Mabel would not, for once, deny the child her wish, in consideration of the importance of not

shortening yet further the amount laid by for their landlord.

The breakfast ready, she passed round to the bed where Mabel lay, intending to waken her. But the worn expression which, even in sleep, set on the pale features of her sister, arrested her attention, and she stood for a while thoughtfully regarding her. Yielding then to one of those impulses which governed her, Hilda dropped on her knees beside the bed, burying her face in the bed-clothes. But even then she could not shut from view the touching picture before her of her loved sister,—the devoted Mabel, who so uncomplainingly toiled to keep in decency their little family. The mute features, stilled in sleep, seemed to reproach her, as waking they had never done, for the small part she took in the day and night toil. *She* had slumbered on her bed, while the loving sister worked; *she* was about to commence a day of comparative ease, while poor Mabel struggled to earn that little which, with a little more, was to keep them yet a while from want.

How often had Mabel said her sister had done her best,—that she had no fault to find with *her*. But, looking into her own heart, as she did

now, Hilda found much to contradict the affectionate assurance. The reproaches which had come to her on her homeward route of yesterday were yet more heavy on her now, and through the self-condemning spirit which filled her, she seemed to see enough in her own want of humble looking to a Higher Power to thwart the beautiful submission of the loving Mabel.

“Even the baby Lilly is wiser in those things than I!” was her thought; “even she has gone forward on the road dear mother tried to lead us to; I alone, of all, have held back. How cold were my prayers of last night, though after the bitter lesson taught me of the morning!—how cold to what they ought to have been, and how proud and stubborn my heart! Oh, how am I to become what I want to be? — how am I to get to feel that happy confidence dear Mabel feels that God is surely working all things well for us? — yes! even at a time like this, when trouble seems coming on every side.”

The answer was in the heart to which the question was put, and Hilda was presently addressing to her God such earnest petitions for his grace as she had never yet sent forth. The murmured

words alone, would scarcely have reached the ears of the sleeping Mabel; but the smothered sobs which accompanied them effectually roused her. One glance at the kneeling form beside her sufficed to explain all; but she refrained from even laying her hand on the bowed head of the young girl, though her heart dictated the movement. When Hilda at length whispered to her that it was time to arise, Mabel gave no intimation that she had witnessed the little scene beside her, though her heart was overflowing with joy at thought of it.

Little Lilly presently put in her plea for eggs, and Hilda looked anxiously at Mabel.

"She must have them," said the latter, in reply to the look; "and I'm happy to know she is so much better as to want them. Poor child! did they cost twice as much, I would not deny her."

It took Hilda full twenty minutes to go to the nearest grocery store and back. On her return, she burst into the room in an excitement which startled both her sisters.

"O Mabel!" she exclaimed, "I'm to hurry through with the shirts quickly as possible, for there's the finest chance I've ever had waiting for me. Mary Griffin just left me at the corner, and

she says there's a standing advertisement in one of the daily papers for a hundred girls to work on vests and pants at Pinch and Company's, on Lake street. But for the shirts, I'd apply for the place this very morning. Mary Griffin herself is going to-day, and there are plenty of girls leaving other places to go; for it's a large store, and they know there'll be good pay and everything right."

Mabel expressed her delight at this good news, and little Lilly, too, clapped her hands, though it was evidently with a great effort she did so.

"You *may* clap your hands, Lilly dear!" cried Hilda, "for my meeting with Mary has turned out something for *you*; only it must be a secret for a little while. I've been dreadfully extravagant, Mabel," she added, in an aside to her sister, "for see, I got this — a whole dime it cost — for Lilly's stocking; she must have *some* Christmas, you know! But then, in a few days, I'll be in this place at Pinch's, and Mary Griffin says she wouldn't wonder if he pays from four to six dollars a week, — just to think! — as it's such a respectable firm, and has out such a big advertisement." And so excited was Hilda at prospect of being employed by

this Mr. Pinch and Company, that she came very near turning over on herself the kettle of boiling water while extracting from it the eggs destined for little Lilly's breakfast.

It was with a happy heart Mabel placed before the latter the small tray, with the eggs, biscuit, and good hot tea. During the past few days the child had been too ill to have even the slight appetite ordinary with her, and Mabel hailed with joy the present appearance of a favorable change. But short time indeed could the devoted girl indulge in the pleasing thought: Lilly turned from her breakfast with a look of distress.

"I can't eat the eggs," she said, tears forcing themselves to her eyes. "I think they'll make me bad again."

"They may do you good, my darling. Just try this one, Lilly."

Lilly shook her head, with a grieved glance at her sister. "I can't even try," she replied. "Take away the tray, Mabel!"

"What, with the nice hot tea and crackers? Wont you even take the tea, Lilly?"

"No, no!—O Mabel! take it all away!"

Mabel did so; then returned to the bed, where

she found Lilly with the spread over her face to conceal that she wept.

“ Are you in pain, my dear Lilly? ”

“ No, no,” sobbed the child, giving way to more violent weeping ; “ but I’m unhappy because — because I’ve been naughty.”

“ You have not been naughty, my darling. Don’t cry, but uncover your face, and look up.”

“ Oh, but I was naughty,” cried the little penitent. “ I knew you hadn’t money to spare for the eggs, yet I let you get them ; and now I can’t eat them, and I’m so sorry ! No good angel will come to me ! — no good angel will love me ! ”

It required considerable effort on the part of Mabel to tranquillize her patient, whose condition, as she now saw, was by no means the improved one she had believed. At length Lilly lay once more quiescent, if not at ease. Mabel then hastened to her sewing-machine, for some time in the hands of Hilda, who worked in a sort of frenzied way at her shirts, that she might the sooner be at leisure to accept one of those hundred positions offered Chicago sewing girls by the respectable firm of Pinch and Company.

Before night came, little Lilly was again in the

suffering condition she had labored under during the several past days, and again was everything forgotten by her faithful nurse save ministering as far as was in her power to the little one's relief.

That night it was Hilda who worked and Mabel who rested; the former having persisted in persuasions to her sister until this arrangement was effected.

Bravely the young girl struggled through that long night against the inclination to sleep which must otherwise have overpowered her. But she nerved herself by the thought of the many weary nights Mabel had done but what she was doing now, and of the courageous Peggy Bonner, who toiled through that night of terrible cold until overtaken by death himself at her task.

There were other thoughts than these making brave Hilda's heart. She was striving to imitate Mabel in Christian virtues, as well as in her persevering industry, and she already experienced some of the reward sure to follow such efforts. A something of the inspiring hope which had long sustained Mabel, was now her own; and it lightened her heart, and lightened her toil, and morning at length peeped in at the window, finding her still

busy over her work. Weary she was, indeed, — weary, and aching in every limb ; but neither desponding, as of old, nor harboring harsh thoughts of those who seemed to stand in the way of her own and her sister's prosperity.

She could only think, with pity rather than anger, of her cousin Algin, who so boldly, as Hilda had said to her, clung to a falsehood, and who seemed, by her wrong to her cousin's orphaned girls, to dare the hand of an avenging Providence. Hilda thought of herself as she had stood before her cousin a morning or two before, — she thought of her words touching her cousin's children, the *four*, corresponding in number with those left by her own mother, — and, remembering the paling cheek and trembling hand of her listener, she felt assured the words had sunk deep.

“ Not for all cousin Algin's wealth,” she thought, “ would I have in my heart the sting those words must have left ! No, no ! if we are *poor*, we have, at least, no such wrong-doing to burden our consciences ! God has been merciful to us — far, far more merciful than to her.”

It was Christmas morning that looked in at the little window, — a Christmas-day sun which pre-

ently followed, touching with its first pale ray the head of the young girl, as she sat bending over her work. Yes, Christmas day had dawned; but it brought no holiday, no recreation to the little family in that humble room, — no gay mingling of friends, no cheering gifts, *no Christmas*, as Hilda had said to her cousin.

Yet even thought of this caused no bitter feeling to Hilda, as she looked up and saw that it was indeed sunlight that gleamed upon her, — that she had worked the whole night through, and was still waking to meet the dawn. She rose noiselessly as possible; — Mabel should sleep yet a while longer; she needed more rest after the previous night's loss; and besides, wasn't it *Christmas*?

A little murmur from Lilly's bed drew her attention, as she was about to throw herself beside Mabel, and she perceived in the little hands, just unclosed from their night's rest, the stocking with that solitary toy which was to make Lilly's all of Christmas. But Lilly's enjoyment of this pleasant surprise was but momentary. She was too ill to play with, or handle, her toy, — too ill to care long even to look at it, when Hilda placed it on the little table beside her. When Mabel wakened, a few

minutes after, it was to see with grief that the child appeared more restlessly uncomfortable than she had yet been.

Breakfast over, the two sisters busied themselves in advancing their several tasks, the morrow being Saturday, the day on which they hoped to have them finished.

Lilly had for some time been under the influence of that only medicine which brought her relief, and Mabel, engaged with her sewing-machine, did not perceive that she had wakened, and lay with her head covered completely with the bed-clothes. When, at length, Mabel approached and drew them down, it was a look of intense distress she saw on the face of her little charge.

“ Please cover my ears, Mabel,” she pleaded; “ put something in them, do! — cover them ever so close!”

“ Is it the sewing-machine worries you, my darling?”

“ Yes, Mabel dear, I can’t bear its whir, whir, try as I may. It goes all the time to my back, sharp and throbbing.”

Mabel did her best to deaden the hearing of the

little sufferer ; then returned once more to her work.

Fifteen or twenty minutes passed, then a sharp cry rang from the bed.

"I can't, oh! I can't bear it, Mabel!" cried the child, as her sister hastened again to her side. "Maybe I don't *hear* it, with all these things in my ears, but I *feel* it, and that's worse. I heard it all night long in my sleep; it brought on such dreadful throbbings! and now it's making me worse than ever."

"My darling shall be troubled no more. Don't be distressed, dear Lilly; it is all over now."

Mabel spoke very firmly, for she meant what she said, — cost what it might, she meant it.

"Mabel, is it naughty not to love the sewing-machine?"

"No, my darling; you are ill, and cannot help its worrying you."

"Oh, but I used to love it so!"

"You were better then, my darling Lilly."

"And I used to love the mountain-ash and the mignonette; and now I don't! I'm not sorry the mountain-ash is all withered up, and I don't want the mignonette near me."

“Although it smells so sweet, dear Lilly?”

“It only worries me, Mabel. I love nothing now but you and Minnie and Hilda — and the good angels; only I’m all the time thinking the angels aint pleased with me.”

“But they certainly are, Lilly; you are a good, suffering child, and they must love you.”

“And will *that* one come soon again? — the visitor of the first-floor lodger?”

“I hope so, dearest. She said she would come.”

“I wish she would. I love to hear her talk to you about angels and sick children; and then she called you ‘sister-mother,’ and I loved that, too.”

Lilly sunk into another slumber. But Mabel did not again start the wheel of the sewing-machine.

“You will really give it up, Mabel?” whispered Hilda.

“Yes, Hilda; the poor child shall be tortured no more. I will do hand-work altogether, and you will get this place at Pinch’s.”

“None of these men will have hand-work, Mabel.”

“Then I will get custom-work; — I *must* get it, Hilda. I will try for it again to-morrow. The

condition of this poor child will embolden me to make efforts that cannot fail of success."

"I have been thinking of *one* place you ought to go to, Mabel," said Hilda, after a pause.

"I know where you mean, and will go there to-morrow. Surely, surely *they* owe us some sympathy, if no other does! Yes, Hilda, I will try Mrs. Barrett."

"In the meanwhile what is to be done about *the rent*? Neither the vests nor the shirts are finished, and with three dollars short, it is needless to go to old Brumbley. I'm pretty brave, but not brave enough for *that*."

"I will try and get something more on the watch. I've been thinking of it for some days past. Then we have part of our work finished, and that will bring us something."

Hilda gravely shook her head.

"Unless quite finished, it is the same as nothing," she said. "I've heard of just such cases, and the employers always refused to pay for the unfinished work. And as to the watch, I don't believe that man will give you another shilling on it."

"Still I can *try*, Hilda. Early to-morrow I will

go take home the vests and shirts. I will *ask* for the money on them, and if they will not give it to me, I cannot help it. Then I will go about the watch, and do the best I can there. After that, I will visit Mrs. Barrett, and may succeed in getting from her a supply of work, or a promise of a supply, which will give me courage to meet our landlord even with the three dollars short.”

CHAPTER XXX.

ARISTOCRACY.



T an early hour of the next morning, Mabel, as she had proposed, carried her own and her sister's work to their several employers. The result was as Hilda had predicted, the employers declined paying anything whatever on the unfinished takes.

From the second of these places, Mabel proceeded to the Clark street pawnbroker's. Hilda was right again. The man refused to give another shilling on the watch.

The place to which Mabel next directed her steps was a large, white marble residence, on Wabash Avenue. The door was opened to her by a servant, who announced that Mrs. Barrett had not yet taken breakfast. Upon the applicant saying, however, that she had called on business, and could not well come again, the woman concluded

to let her wait at the door until she carried this message to her mistress.

Presently she returned, saying that Mabel might come into the library until Mrs. Barrett was ready to see her. The door of a near room was opened by the woman, and Mabel walked in. It was a handsomely furnished apartment, with showy oaken bookcases on one side, and a large grate burning on the other.

Before the grate sat, or rather lounged, in a comfortable arm-chair, a young man of about twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, a tasselled cap on his head, and a meerschaum in his hand. He was engaged in reading the morning papers, several of which lay about him on the floor in careless confusion. The sound of the door opening and closing caused him to look up, and Mabel recognized the features of young Ralph Barrett.

However unwelcome the recognition may have been to her, young Ralph himself appeared well pleased at the meeting ; and, notwithstanding Mabel's reserve and constraint of manner, he made efforts at conversation until his mother appeared at the door, when he immediately retired.

Mrs. Barrett was a person of particularly unprepossessing manner. There was a cold, suspicious look in her eye, and an ungraciousness in her deportment, particularly when brought in contact with those she called her "inferiors," by which she meant persons without pretensions to such means as were enjoyed by herself. Mabel had not seen her since some time before the death of her mother, and, with all the brave heart she had brought with her, she felt a cold sickness come over her, upon finding herself in her presence. Perhaps Mrs. Barrett's eye was more than usually suspicious as it fell upon her.

Mabel had risen to meet her, and as Mrs. Barrett did not take a seat herself, she remained standing. No hand was offered her, no smile vouchsafed her; simply a "good morning," and a fixing of the cold eye in a questioning way upon her.

Mabel, briefly as possible, stated the purpose of her visit.

"Oh, you have called for work," said Mrs. Barrett, letting her eye fall from Mabel's face to the shabby dress she wore. "I thought maybe it was to ask assistance."

The last words were added after a moment's

hesitation. She could not — dared not, soulless as she was, say “*to beg.*”

“I simply want work,” repeated Mabel, never dropping her eyes, though a faint flush tingled in her cheeks, and a tide of thought rushed over her mind regarding the time when the husband of the lady was clerk in her father’s store, and the lady herself, then unmarried, a seamstress in her mother’s family. “I am obliged to seek custom-work,” she added, “as the extremely nervous condition of my little sister does not permit me to use the sewing-machine.”

“I heard about the child,” rejoined Mrs. Barrett, coldly. “Why can’t your other sister see to her, and let you be free to work out? Everybody knows sewing-girls do a good business, and, if they keep steady to the employment given to them by the stores, have no need to run round to people’s houses hunting up help.”

● “No one can attend properly to my little sister but myself, Mrs. Barrett.”

“Of course not, as long as you indulge her. But you want work, you say, and I really have none to give you. I have a sewing-girl in the

house, and I find that cheaper than putting my work out."

But Mabel *must* have work! She thought of the ruin staring them in the face, and would not be discouraged by the present rebuff.

"Could not you recommend me to some of your friends, Mrs. Barrett?" she asked. "I am a neat worker."

"Well, perhaps I might; at least I could send you to some one who would employ you if you suited them. I never *recommend* any one that I don't know something about."

Mabel knew that these words referred to her capacity as a workwoman only; yet the words fell on her harshly and crushingly.

"Mrs. Haggis is a very worthy lady," remarked Mrs. Barrett, as she gave a card with directions to Mabel; "in fact, her husband has recently become rich, and as she's not at all proud, — not having been long in the aristocracy, — I don't think I could do better than send you to her. You may, in fact, use my name in asking to see her, and as she knows *my* position in society, it will be everything to you." Mrs. Barrett was, no doubt, pleased to get off with serving the reduced

daughter of her own and husband's old employer at so cheap a rate. It was a sort of *second-hand* service which put her to little trouble.

Mrs. Hagges lived but a few squares from Mrs. Barrett, and a minute or two found Mabel at the door. Almost at the moment she rang the bell, the door was opened by a young lady, of whose age Mabel could not even form a guess. Judging from her face and height, she would have taken her for twelve, or so; by her dress, — she was in full promenade costume, — for five or six years older. She stared in a childlike way at Mabel, who, taken by surprise by the showy little figure, did not immediately speak.

"I don't know if ma's in," she replied, when Mabel, at length, stated her errand. "I was sleeping out with a friend, and have only just got home. What d'you want with ma?"

"I wish to see her on business. I was sent by Mrs. Barrett, three squares below, who said I might use her name."

"Oh, my! you were sent by Mrs. Barrett?" and at the talismanic name, little Miss Hagges's eyes fairly danced with pleasure. "Oh, I *know* ma'll see you, if she's home! Please step into

the" — a pause, and a glance at Mabel's shabby dress — "into the *hall*, and I'll send the girl to see."

Mabel did as she was directed, and the little doll danced off into one of the near rooms, and presently Mabel heard the sound of the bell.

A tidily dressed young woman replied to the summons, and stated to the young lady that Mrs. Hagges was at home. "Then go directly to ma's room," rejoined her little mistress, "and tell her a" — another glance from Mabel's face to her overworn dress — "a young *woman* wants to see her on business, and was sent by *Mrs. Barrett*."

The woman paused to take a survey of Mabel, beginning at her face, ascending to her plain hat, then gradually *descending* to the faded hem of her old dress and her rubbed shoes; after which, with the faintest suspicion of a smile, she departed on her errand.

Meanwhile, from her position in the hall, Mabel saw the pretty doll walk up to a large mirror, lay aside her jockey hat with its plume and bugled veil, and begin, with much apparent satisfaction, to smooth and arrange her curls and the ribbons *confining* them.

“What a pretty little creature!” thought Mabel. “I wonder if she’s a child or a young woman.”

The servant reappeared, saying that Mrs. Hagges was at home, and would presently be down, and that she desired the “young woman” to be shown into the “study.” The little girl had now come out of the room, and while the servant spoke, both she and the latter took a deliberate survey of the visitor, making, as it would seem, a mental inventory of her outward appearings. This satisfactorily concluded, the woman opened the door of a room opposite that from which her young mistress had come, and Mabel gladly availed herself of the invitation to enter. The door was closed on her, and not opened again until Mrs. Hagges herself appeared.

Mrs. Hagges was in all respects a very different woman from Mrs. Barrett. Her face expressed good feeling and good humor in every feature, and her manner a warmth and kindness altogether in keeping with it. This was the natural woman; but a curious uncertainty of speech and deportment, not calculated to impress others favorably, and, as could well be seen, particularly dis-

tressing to the lady herself, had characterized Mrs. Haggis since the period of her own and family's exaltation. She looked warm and flushed just now, and received Mabel with an ill-assured air, as though uncertain whether to act naturally or assume that appearance and tone of consequence which accorded best with her ideas of an aristocratic lady. It may, to her credit, be stated, that through the interview which followed, the unpretending, whole-souled *woman* continually "cropped out," despite the efforts of the *lady* to keep it down; and, also, that it impressed Mabel to the full amount of its worth, notwithstanding the mountains of absurdity which at times covered it up.

"They say you were sent by Mrs. Barrett," were her first words, delivered in the uncertain manner referred to; then, after an honest, confiding look into the young face, with its eyes half running with tears, she put forth her hand, and shook Mabel's warmly.

"Sit down — sit down!" she said. "You look weakish and tired, and oughtn't to be standing."

Mabel thanked her, and willingly took the proffered seat.

Then followed an explanation from Mabel concerning the purpose of her visit, and a good deal of talk upon the part of Mrs. Hagges, both relevant and irrelevant to the occasion. She particularly questioned Mabel regarding little Lilly, in whose unhappy condition she expressed much interest, and a case similar to whose had been, she said, in the family of her own brother-in-law's half-sister. Then she proceeded to inform her visitor that the young lady she had seen was her only child, christened "Jane Eliza," and formerly called "Jane Lize," though now altogether, "Lizie," the Jane being dropped, as too common. "Lizie" was just turned of sixteen, and had recently come home "graduated" from a New York boarding-school. Mrs. Hagges said the sending of her daughter away to school was opposed to her own wishes entirely; but that Mr. Hagges had insisted on the measure, and she had then "washed her hands" of it, and felt no responsibility of her daughter since; that they took the responsibility of girls "professionally," her husband said, at such places; and as they were all the time bringing up girls,

and graduating them, why they "had their hands in," and knew what they were about. For herself, since her husband had become rich, she was well pleased she had let him have his way about Lizie ; for, though she would have made her a good enough girl at home, there were other things very important to her now, which she was sure she would have made blunder upon blunder about.

"But then there's the sewing," abruptly added Mrs. Hagges ; "it's that you want to be seeing about, and I musn't take up your time with other things. Now, the truth is, I haven't a rag to be made up, such a getting of new things as there's been since Mr. Hagges's luck in the oil ; but then it makes no difference if I get more," she continued, reading the disappointment expressed on her visitor's countenance. "It'll do no harm to have plenty, over and above, to lay by ; so I'll get in some stuffs, and have you call again to get the work."

At that moment, the door abruptly opened, and Miss Lizie Hagges entered, sweeping after her two feet of rich silk train. She gave a brief and not over-pleased look at Mabel, notwithstanding she *had* come from Mrs. Barrett, then deliberately turn-

ing her back on her, took a step toward Mrs. Hagges, who, as Mabel perceived, looked considerably embarrassed.

"Ma!" she said, "you're forgetting the carriage is ordered for twelve, and you have your toilet to make. We have shopping to do, and numbers of visits to return, and after that to dress again for dinner, for pa told me that he had invited several gentlemen to dine with him to-day."

Mrs. Hagges made some incoherent acknowledgment of these several forgotten duties, then hurriedly rising, said to Mabel, —

"You can call again, next Tuesday, young woman."

"Not *Tuesday*, ma!" interrupted Miss Lizie; "for it's the day of our ball. The young woman mustn't come on Tuesday."

"Oh, well, Wednesday 'll do as well," said poor, flustered Mrs. Hagges. "I'm sure she can come Wednesday."

"*Wednesday*, ma? What *can* you be thinking of? You'll not be up before twelve on Wednesday; and, after that, you can't attend to *business*."

"I will call at ten, on Thursday morning,

ma'am," said Mabel, who had stood waiting to depart.

This time Mrs. Hagges looked at her daughter for answer ; and the latter, without so much as a glance at Mabel, sulkily replied, —

" Yes, *she* can come on Thursday."

Mabel bid good-day to Mrs. Hagges, and left the room. As she went to the front door, she saw mother and daughter passing the hall to the stairs, the latter sweeping along at a swift pace, the former following more leisurely. Just as Mrs. Hagges had her hand on the balusters, she looked round, and perceived that Mabel was making fruitless attempts to master the intricacies of the door-latch. In an instant, the good woman was hurrying, with a speed no one would have thought possible from her proportions, to the dining-room near at hand. Here she disappeared for a moment, then again came forth, and sped across the hall, not forgetting to give a hurried glance up the stairway, to make sure the doll was not observing her.

" Here, dearie !" she whispered, just as Mabel had succeeded in opening the door, " take this to the little sick child." And she thrust under the *young girl's* cloak a jar of preserved peaches, just

brought for the dining-room. Then, while Mabel was in the act of thanking her, she put her out of the door, and shut the latter to, saying, hurriedly, "Don't you be frightened out of coming Thursday, mind!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

“WILL YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOR?” ETC.



ABEL had just turned into Twelfth street, when, to her surprise, she was joined by young Ralph Barrett.

“I tried to see you before you got to Mrs. Hagges’s” were the words with which he followed his salutation. “After you left my mother, she regretted she had not brought your interview to a different conclusion. She had not, in fact, taken time to reflect upon the true circumstances of the case.”

Here Mr. Ralph paused, glanced at his companion, — who had stopped from the moment of his joining her, — then resumed in these words : —

“It is a delicate matter, Miss Ross, that I have undertaken for my mother, but it must be arranged agreeably to her wish. She has desired me to beg

your acceptance of this, as a mark of her friendship." And he proffered Mabel a bank-bill.

The young girl drew back, a flush on her cheek.

"I cannot think of it," she said. "I called on Mrs. Barrett with no such object. She perfectly understood my wish was to procure work."

"Of course — certainly, it is clearly understood," rejoined the young gentleman, recovering himself from visible embarrassment; "yet still my mother regretted having let you go without begging your acceptance of this. You will hurt her much by refusing. Our relative positions, you know, — that is, my mother feels that she really *owes* to your family a debt which twenty times this wouldn't cover."

"It would not, indeed!" thought Mabel; and she paused before again speaking. In that pause, she saw before her the little Lilly and all the trials of that home to which she was returning. She thought of the rent day with the rent not ready, and the dreaded visit of the unfeeling Brumbley.

"I am obliged to Mrs. Barrett," she then said. "I will return and accept this gift at her own hands."

"She expressly desired you would not do so,"

rejoined young Ralph. "My mother is peculiar in this respect; and then to be thanked, you know, for such a trifle, and under the circumstances" —

"Then I will write and thank her," said Mabel. "That would be more agreeable to us both."

"Certainly. If you will intrust your note to *me*, I will call any time you say to-morrow. You live" —

How had Mabel forgotten *the watch*? — for, for the time, she *had* forgotten it, — how had she forgotten the uneasy thoughts which made her breathe freely only after she had quite gotten from the presence of young Barrett, the afternoon of her visit to the pawnbroker's?

"Upon reflection, I cannot accept your mother's offer, Mr. Barrett," she said, in a particularly firm tone. "She is kind, — you may thank her for me, — but I shall stand by my first thought, — only to receive remuneration for services."

Adding a hasty good-morning, Mabel was hurrying off, when Mr. Ralph followed a step to say, —

"At least, give me your direction, Miss Ross, in case my mother should desire to write to *you*."

"There is no occasion," Mabel coldly replied, and very determinedly walked on. With an uneasy thought that young Barrett might endeavor to discover her home by following her, she took a circuitous route, though anxious to be back with her little charge.

She had, taking all together, a fair report to give at home of her morning's efforts, since the promise of work from Mrs. Haggess made up for the disappointment of her visit to Mrs. Barrett. Great was the surprise of little Lilly when her sister produced from under her cloak the jar of peaches sent by the kind Mrs. Haggess.

"How kind and good of her!" she said, as, having explained concerning it, Mabel brought it to the bed. "Beautiful, clear peaches! What a nice lady! — a good angel, Mabel!"

"Yes, my darling, kind and good."

"The other good angel, — the visitor to the first-floor lodger, — maybe wont come any more," said Lilly, sorrowfully. "Hilda's been down to the first floor two or three times, this morning, and Mrs. Moppit's away, — all shut up still; so Hilda thinks, maybe, she's gone for good."

"But we mustn't be concerned till we know,

Lilly. Besides, even if Mrs. Moppit is gone, her visitor may come to us. You know she said she would come, and I believe she meant to keep her word."

Meanwhile, Hilda was putting on her hat and shawl to go proffer her services to Mr. Pinch, of Lake street. She was in a most hopeful mood, and could see nothing but the most favorable termination to her new undertaking. Mabel strove to temper her expectations with some of her own moderation, but Hilda was not to be impressed.

"I'm going to hope for the very best," she said, as she kissed first Mabel, then Lilly, at parting; "and you'll see what fine reports I'll bring you from Pinch and Company's. Cheer up, both of you, for it's now come *my* turn to take the burden, and I don't care how heavy it be, so I only get good pay at Mr. Pinch's."

When she returned, it was in no less good spirits than she had gone forth. She was to go on Monday morning to begin working for her new employer. Mr. Pinch couldn't say exactly yet what would be her weekly wages, but she was quite sure, from his manner altogether, and from the numbers of girls who were ready to go to

him, that it would be something well worth having. Mary Griffin had said between four and six dollars ; she believed herself that it would be every shilling of the six. She wasn't going to be a bit frightened about Monday and old Brumbley. They'd just let him alone, and if, finding they didn't come to him, *he* came to *them*, they could face him boldly with such work promised as that of Mrs. Haggess and Pinch and Company's.

Certainly their prospects were appearing brighter and more certain than they had done that morning, and Mabel was not one to be backward in hopefulness. Little Lilly was doing more comfortably too, and that was enough in itself to cheer her.

The Sabbath morning broke on them clear, though very cold, and Lilly still continuing better, it was a day enjoyed by the little family as few had lately been.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANOTHER VISITOR.



WHEN Hilda returned from her first day's work at Mr. Pinch's, it was with her hopes a little dampened. She had seen nothing of Mary Griffin or Mary Griffin's friends, who had, she supposed, gone to work on Friday. Neither did the character of the work prove what she had been led to look for from the advertisement. She had been set to sew at overalls, — all the girls in the room were working at overalls. They were every one strangers to her, and strangers to the store, having only commenced that morning, like herself. Still Mr. Pinch spoke fair, and she was sure all was right. He could not yet name the wages, but told her she might make sure of being paid according to her work, and a good, fair price; and, as she had made up her mind to keep "up to the mark," — a favorite expression of Hilda's, — she

didn't fear but she would come out with the best of them.

According to the plan proposed, Mabel had not gone to offer her partial rent to the landlord; a visit from Brumbley was then to be looked for that evening, if he concluded to be *good* as his word.

It is possible that Hilda was more discouraged through her day's experience of her new place than she was willing to acknowledge; for she no longer spoke with indifference of the probable visit of the house-agent. All her old terror of this man revived; nor was Mabel without sympathy in it, though she made every effort to preserve her customary composure.

"It is possible he wont come, — don't you think so?" questioned Hilda, with a look which a good deal contradicted her own belief in this "possible."

"I think he will," was the reply. "From all I have seen of the man, I believe him one to act up to his threat."

"Mabel, suppose he turns us out! Think of Lilly!"

"I have *thought of it all*. Still I hope — I trust

to get one week's grace out of him. All there is left us is to try for it."

Lilly was more feeble to-day than Mabel had yet seen her, though not suffering so intensely as she had latterly done; and she lay in a quiet state, as the shades of evening closed around, noticing little of what passed about her. Her eyes were fixed, in a half-dreamy way, upon Mabel, as the latter busied herself at her ironing-table; but they did not glance from one to the other of her sisters, as they whispered, in the way customary with her.

Minutes passed on minutes, and the hour of seven sounded. Hilda looked up to Mabel from the old dress she was repairing, and the latter paused in her ironing.

"Full seven!" said Hilda, in an emphatic whisper. "I begin to breathe, Mabel. Somehow, I've said to myself, from the first, 'When it comes to *seven*, I'll believe we're clear, for this time, of the bugbear.'"

Mabel had, perhaps, said to herself something of the same sort; for her eyes were looking brighter now, and an expression of infinite relief was on her countenance as she glanced in the direction of Lilly's bed.

"With every moment, I shall be better satisfied," she said. "There is no reason, I can see, why, if the visit was to be made, it should not have been made long ago."

"Of course not. Business hours are over now. This old Brumbley's not going to spoil his supper for us, however pleasant he might find it to give us a fright. We're all right, Mabel, — all right for this time, come what may to-morrow."

Almost as she spoke, the outside door of the house opened, and noisily closed again. A dead silence followed.

"It's he!" said Hilda, under her breath. Mabel did not reply. She was looking uneasily in the direction of Lilly, fearful of her being startled from her partial slumber by the unusual sound.

The silence below was broken by a shuffling step along the narrow entry; then came the uncertain tread of a foot ascending the stair.

Mabel put the iron from her hand, and went noiselessly to the side of her little charge. She bent down her ear to Lilly's lips, and found that her breathing was still regular. Then, anticipating the condition of pain and excitement likely to be caused by the coming visit of the house-agent, she

began to prepare for her unconscious patient a dose of the morphine.

Meanwhile, the ascending steps shuffled on, and arrived outside the chamber-door; and the next moment the knob was turned, and Brumbley entered the room. Just within the door, he paused, and slowly looked around him, an ugly gleam in his eye, and something of a mocking smile on his lip. Drawing up with his gaze upon Mabel, as she stood by Lilly's pillow, he broke the silence with, —

“I said, if you didn't come to *me*, I'd come to *you*; and I never break my word.”

“I was unable to keep the rent entire for you,” Mabel replied, composedly as she could; “and I hoped it would make little difference if you got it next week instead of to-day.”

“Is it pay next week? I mean is the money owing you; and is the person owing it — a reliable person, it must be — bound by promise to pay at this time?”

“It is not owing; nor is it promised, except as pay for work to be given.” Mabel spoke with her eye fixed directly upon the ugly face before her; for Brumbley had now approached quite near to where she stood.

"Then it's the old dodge, that I know every turn of," was the rejoinder. "But it's played out. *I*, for one, can't be put on by it. Coming down to simple fact, your rent's over due, and you haven't money to pay it."

"I have three dollars, two shillings," said Mabel. "If you will take that now, I have little doubt of being able to pay you the rest in a week's time."

"No, no! you can't come that dodge, neither," replied the man. "*I* have gone through the mill, and know what take part to-day and the rest to-morrow means. It's *all* or *none* — *all* or *none*. If you haven't *all*, the move is for you to quit the premises."

"Quite impossible, with a child so ill as this," said Mabel, with a firmness that surprised herself.

"You must be merciful, Mr. Brumbley, and give us a little time."

"Look you!" cried the heartless creature, advancing his clenched hand till he brought it directly before Mabel's face, "what was my warning to you the day you came about renting this room? What did I say to you, first and last? Wasn't it, 'Don't throw the sick child in my face; don't

throw the sick child in my face'? It was; and you know it. Now you've done it, — you've thrown at me your sick child, as I said you would; and the dodge wont serve your turn any better than the others. Sick child, or no sick child, you leave these premises forthwith — *forthwith*."

A glance from Mabel at her charge discovered Lilly with her eyes fixed in a terrified stare upon the house-agent. The former had been on the watch for this waking; and she now bent down, and whispered some reassuring words to the child.

"It is simply impossible, as I said before, Mr. Brumbley," she then replied to the man, turning to him once more. "Common humanity calls for some mercy in a case like this."

"What do I know about your 'common humanity'?" (What, indeed!) "I'm proprietor of this house, and look to the interests of the owner. The child shall be carried out, — carried out, I tell you, sick or *dead*."

Upon this, little Lilly cried out piteously, and, for a short time, Mabel's whole attention was given to her.

"Mabel! Mabel! will he put me out? — oh! oh! will he kill me?"

"No, indeed, my darling; no one shall touch you. Take your medicine, dear Lilly, or you will have some of your ugly pains."

"They're coming now, Mabel! oh! I feel so bad! Make that naughty man go away, Mabel! — please make him go!"

Hilda had until now been but a looker-on of the scene, not having even moved from the spot where she stood at the time the first sound was made below by the house-agent. Great was her terror of this Brumbley, — so great as quite to subdue the ready spirit which characterized her. But the appeal of poor Lilly aroused her indignation against their oppressor to a point where fear and prudence were left far behind.

"You know nothing of *humanity*," she cried, stepping before him with flashing eyes, "but *decency*, at least, you're forced to observe. Quit the presence of this poor child this moment! — you're injuring her, — you're killing her."

"So, so! *you* throw the sick child at me too, do you?" tauntingly replied Brumbley, turning the full glare of his ugly eyes upon her.

"I order you from her presence," cried Hilda,

excitedly. "Instantly leave this room! — instantly leave it!"

"Then you leave this house, — the whole trumpery of you, — this, — no, not this night," (for the coward knew he dared not go so far), — "but by eight o'clock to-morrow morning. *I*, for one, aint to be put off by a scolding girl's tongue, — I've gone through the mill, and I know every dodge of it. If I find you here after eight to-morrow, I seize everything belonging to you, and turn you into the street, off of hand. I'll not leave you the bed your child lies on, — mind you that."

Poor little Lilly's terror and pain had now reached their culminating point, and Mabel had no moment to give to the scene enacting between the impetuous Hilda and their persecutor; thus Hilda was left to conduct the defence of herself and sister as she thought proper.

"By that time to-morrow, you piece of inhumanity," she angrily rejoined, "I shall be round to your office with the full seven dollars, so we can defy you — then and now. Get out of this at once, — we can't bear you here another minute, — not one!"

"I'll stand to my word," said the mean creature,

shuffling off to the door; "so you look to it! You'll no more have the money to-morrow than to-day, and I hold you between my thumb and finger, your sick child and the rest of it. You shall be turned out;—the child shall be turned out."

In a momentary lull of her own voice, Lilly caught the last words, and sent forth another shriek of terror and of appeal to Mabel.

"Off with you!—out of this at once!" cried Hilda, following on his footsteps, and motioning fiercely to the door.

The man turned and scowled at her. "*I*, for one, wont be sorry to see you get your deserts," said he; "and I'll give them to you yet."

With the last words he reached the door, opened it and passed out, and to the concluding one Hilda formed a noisy accompaniment by slamming the door upon him, doing this so violently as nearly to pitch him down the stairs. He was, in fact, heard to stumble, and to catch at the balusters with a muttered oath.

A sudden and dead calm reigned in the room he had left. Hilda remained perfectly still on the spot from whence she had given her last angry dem-

onstratation ; Mabel stood pale and trembling by Lilly's bed-side, and poor Lilly, with every sound of pain and terror hushed by a mighty effort, lay like a stricken thing upon the bed. The eyes of the two older sisters were turned upon each other, those of the child upon the door by which had departed the object of her mortal dread. One, two, three minutes passed ; then came the slam of the street-door. Brumbley had left the house.

"Gone," exultingly cried Hilda. "We're rid of the old bugbear for this time."

Little Lilly dropped her strained eyes from the door, and began to relieve her pent feelings by the low murmur which was the usual forerunner of her medicine-gained ease.

"O Hilda ! what have you done ?" cried Mabel. "He has gone exasperated beyond anything we can hope to conciliate."

"What have I done ?" replied Hilda, still exultingly ; "why, I have '*kept my powder dry.*' And now, Mabel, I leave to you the part you can so well perform, — the '*trusting in Providence.*' — Not to say, though, but that I shall do a good share of trusting myself."

"My dear sister ! do you not see that by put-

ting him off with this positive promise, you only make our trouble to-morrow more certain ? ”

“ I shall gain time, Mabel, and everybody knows that is good generalship. He’s gotten rid of; and darling Lilly is getting to sleep; and, by and by, we shall get some sleep, too.”

“ But *to-morrow*, Hilda ? ”

“ What a new thing, Mabel, for you to be troubling yourself so much about ‘to-morrow!’ Haven’t you been long teaching me to hope and trust? Yet now when I *am* hoping and trusting, you’d have me desponding.”

“ I’m concerned because of the promise, Hilda; and because of your having angered the man so terribly. When he comes again,” —

“ No doubt it will be in quite as sweet a temper as he came to-night. So far as I can judge, he commenced as like a bear with a sore head as he well could; and, even if he had been paid his money it’s not likely he’d have overburdened us with civility. Now, it appears to me, if we’re sensible girls, we’ll just go back to our sewing and ironing, and drop the subject of old Brumbley till ” —

“ Till he comes again, Hilda ? ”

“ Yes; — or till I go to him. Stranger things

have happened than my keeping this promise, Mabel. Remember the manna and the ravens! Is it too short a time between now and eight o'clock tomorrow for a miracle to be performed? No, no, Mabel. So let us enjoy the present respite from the grip of old Shuffle, and hope for the best."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE RAG-MERCHANTS.



HE next day found little Lilly in a particularly feeble condition, — the result of the terror and excitement of the preceding evening. Mabel was quiet and anxious; Hilda, on the contrary, more than usually active and talkative.

“You wont let that ugly, bad man come again, Mabel?” pleaded Lilly, as she took a little of the hot tea prepared by her sister. “You wont let him turn me out, and take my bed?”

“No one shall touch you, my darling. Mabel will guard you from everything.”

“But say he shan’t come again, Mabel. I want to hear you say *that*.”

“He certainly shall not harm you, my precious.”

“And *I* say he *shan’t come*,” very positively said Hilda. “Make sure of that, Lilly,

dear, — the old Brumbley comes here no more.”

“I’m so glad!” said Lilly, with a little sigh of relief. “And, Hilda — Mabel — will the visitor of the first floor come instead?”

“We all hope she may, darling,” Mabel replied.

“I’ll stop, as I go out, and see if Mrs. Moppit’s home yet,” said Hilda. “I’m hurrying breakfast, you know, to get out early. I promised to see old Brumbley, Mabel, and I *shall* see him.”

Mabel looked her surprise across the little table where they sat.

“To what purpose? you would ask,” observed Hilda, replying to the look. “Well, well, I’m going to pacify him, or — defy him, as I said I would. Make yourself and Lilly easy as you can, Mabel. With or without a miracle, God is going to help us out of this trouble.”

She abruptly left the breakfast-table, her bread and potatoes but half eaten; and having hurriedly kissed her sisters, went to the closet to make her preparations for going out. She put on her hat, and an old sack which she had the evening before mended up; then carefully made into a bundle the

merino dress and good shawl given her by her cousin Algin.

Not sure that she could effect her escape from the room with this bundle, — which was a sizable one, — without attracting the notice of Mabel or the child, she became so nervous and embarrassed as almost to draw upon herself the attention she was so desirous to avoid; and when, finally, she found herself on the outside of the chamber-door, with her purpose accomplished, she was quite trembling with agitation.

According to the promise made Lilly, she stopped at the door of Mrs. Moppit's room, knocking several times, and making quite sure she really was not there before leaving the house. Mrs. Moppit evidently was still from home, however; and a glance at the outside of the house showed the windows still tightly closed, as when she had made her observations before.

As Hilda was on the point of closing the house-door, a cart appeared at the turn of the near corner, and the well-known cry of the ragman struck on her ear. The cart and driver were frequent visitors to the neighborhood, being the same that little Lilly had watched with such interest from the

window. There had also been a period of great moment to the little girl, in connection with this "establishment;" and that was, when, every old matter that could prudently be dispensed with having been carefully looked up and gathered together by Mabel and Hilda, the grand occasion came when they were disposed of to the itinerant merchants. To have the rag-firm stop beneath their own window, to see their own bundles carried out by Hilda, and, after being weighed, thrown with the rest into the cart; and then to have Hilda return, in a little flutter of delight, and present Mabel with the whole of seven shillings as the purchase money of their gatherings, — oh! it formed altogether a scene never to be forgotten by the poor, crippled child, whose days were passed in such monotony and privation in that close little room.

As has been said, the appearance of the rag-merchants took place at the moment Hilda was about to leave the house. Moreover it stayed her departure. Most opportune seemed to her their coming, for it was likely to save her much time and trouble.

The man looked straight forward over the ears

of his horse — an animal in perfect keeping with the rest of the turn-out — and in a voice of one intonation, called out the magic monosyllable, “Rags!”

From behind invariably followed an echo of the same, though delivered in a much higher pitch, while for the drawl of the first was substituted a little, short, blunt style of enunciation, which, coming so immediately after the lengthened one, produced a particularly ludicrous effect. The second speaker was a small boy, — unquestionably the son of the driver, and in every respect a curious counterpart of him, — who sat in the body of the cart, surrounded by the ill-looking, stuffed-out, and leaky bags generally to be seen in company with business people of this description.

No words can describe the total apathy which seemed to have taken possession of not only the man and boy, but of the horse as well. One might have fancied all three to be in performance of some dreary penance of no possible interest to themselves, and which was such an old story with them that it had come to be performed in mechanical unconsciousness.

Waiting till the cart dragged its weary way to

the house, Hilda made a sign to the driver to stop.

"Rags!" he cried, catching the signal from the corner of his eye, and mechanically coming to a stand-still, and "Rags!" echoed the little urchin from the rear, his eyes never moving from the old, high-crowned hat worn by his father, which seemed the guiding point by which he steered.

Hilda passed down to the curb, from whence she gave a hurried glance up to the window of their little room. The survey seemed satisfactory, and she turned to address the rag-merchant.

"Can you direct me to any place where they buy second-hand clothing?" she asked; "dresses and shawls, and things of that sort."

The man brought his regards from over the ears of his horse to the face of the speaker.

It appeared to take some time for the meaning of her words to be duly appreciated, for something near a minute elapsed before he replied, "My old woman buys 'em. She have a store on Clark and Twenty-second. I buys 'em too, sometimes."

"Then you can tell me what these I have here are worth," rejoined Hilda. "But you must come into the house to look at them."



HILDA AND THE RAG MERCHANT.

The man stared at her; then slowly got down from his seat and followed her into the house. Hilda opened her bundle, and tremblingly displayed her merino dress and shawl; each of which, in turn, the man examined with critical eye. Having held them up and looked through them; then brought them to close investigation, then again held them off and squinted at them, he returned them to their owner.

“D’ye mean t’sell ’em both?” he asked.

“Yes. But I want a good price for them — the very best you can offer.”

“I mought give you five dollars for ’em.”

“I’ll take it!”

The poor girl spoke the words so quickly that any other than the slow person with whom she was dealing must have seen the price named was far more than she had looked for. If *he* saw it, he was either too apathetic, or too honest to take advantage of it, for he quietly took from his pocket a greasy portmonnaie, and having extracted from it the sum named, in good one-dollar *greenbacks*, he placed them in Hilda’s hand.

Hilda could not receive them so silently as they

were given, — a ready “thank you!” bursting from her lips.

The man looked at her curiously for a moment, then quietly rolled up the dress and shawl and tucked them under his arm. About to pass out, he stopped, and giving a rap with the back of his hand to the door of the first floor, said, —

“She’s away, — gone a nursin’ to a sick woman.”

“Do you know her?” asked Hilda, rather quickly, for she was thinking of little Lilly, and her interest in the visitor of Mrs. Moppit, — “I mean do you know Mrs. Moppit?”

“I know her, ’cause I know the woman she’s a nursin.’ Barbara Strand’s ’bout the best woman breathin’; she did for my old woman an’ th’ two twins when all three was a dyin’; an’ after *that* I’ll ’member her to my last day.”

“And is it Barbara Strand who is sick?” questioned Hilda.

“Yes, sick ’nough. My old woman’s put out for fear she die. Never was no woman better nor Barbara Strand!”

“I’m very sorry to hear she’s sick,” said Hilda, now quite satisfied that this Barbara was no other *than* their interesting visitor. “She came to see

us a while ago, and promised to come again. We have all been looking for her since ; but most of all my little sister, who is very sick."

" Ah ! she takes to children, Barbara does," returned the man, — "'specilly children that's sick. Never see nothin' like Barbara with sick little ones ! Maybe my old woman'd be sayin' to her, — for onct in a while she gets seein' of her, — how the little one — your sister — looks for her. Barbara don't forget none of the sick children she sees."

" I wish *you would* have your wife tell her," said Hilda, surprised at the man's readiness to talk on this one subject, and a little, too, at her own willingness to fall into the colloquy. " I would like Mrs. Strand to know that we have none of us forgotten her."

The ragman nodded his head, hitched up his bundle, and again was on the point of leaving ; then, pausing once more, he significantly touched the bundle, and looking over his shoulder at Hilda, said : " There's somethin' more nor sickness th' matter when it comes t' *this*. I've seen such things, an' *I know*. But it's none o' my business, — course 't none o' my business."

Before Hilda could recover from her surprise at these words, the rag merchant was at his cart, stowing away in a safe corner his new purchase. She stood looking at him until the "establishment" began to move off, then closed the door behind her, and sped away in the direction of Brumbley's office. She heard the cart moving on through little crowded Polk street, and the cry of the rag-merchants' renewed; but it was like something she had no concern in now. She never thought of her good merino dress, and warm double shawl,—the only good clothing she had owned,—hidden in a corner of the ragman's cart; she never looked to how she was to get through that pinching cold winter without them; her mind was on the *five dollars*, which, with what she had brought away from Mabel, was more than enough for the rent, and that she carried within the old glove on her hand.

"I hold you between my thumb and finger," the house-agent had said to her the evening before. "I now hold *him* in the hollow of my hand!" said the young girl to herself now. "Yes, the seven dollars will buy him,—his mean soul will succumb before it. He may be crabbed and cross,

bearish and savage; but his power to molest us is passed from him. Dear Mabel and darling little Lilly may breathe freely again; — for *one month*, at least, we can defy him.”

About an hour later she returned, and hurrying up to the room, silently placed in Mabel’s hand, Brumbley’s receipt for the coming month’s rent.

“My dear sister, this is welcome, indeed!” exclaimed Mabel. “I have scarcely permitted myself to think how time was passing, — how every minute was bringing us nearer that terrible eight o’clock. But say, dear Hilda, how did you get the money?”

“By a miracle, maybe,” Hilda gayly replied, stooping to kiss her sister’s cheek. “But see! we’re not left penniless by this mighty rent-paying: here’s something to begin again on;” and she placed in Mabel’s hand the residue of the money.

Mabel looked surprised, and not a little anxious, too.

“But seriously, dear Hilda, how did you come by it?”

“Seriously, Mabel, I came by it honestly,” Hilda replied, — “honestly enough to satisfy even your fastidious fancy. There is no need to be

more explicit at present, you must exercise a little of your faith in my favor. And now I must tell you how our old enemy received me and the money."

She then related how she had continued to hold with him the "high hand" she had taken the evening before; how he had affected to be agreeably surprised, when she knew he was really sadly disappointed at her fulfilling of her promise; how he had snarlingly said it was as well she should know, in consideration of the *future*, that he had laid his plans for fulfilment of *his* promise by quarter after eight that morning; and how, after getting her receipt for the rent-money, she had given him a "little bit of her mind," and come away.

"Let us be thankful that God has relieved us in our great trouble," said Mabel. "I do not question you further, dear Hilda, about how you came by the money, but leave you to tell me in your own time."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE LADY-PRESIDENT.



THURSDAY came round, and Mabel left home to pay her second visit as agreed upon to Mrs. Hagges.

For the first time, she was this morning obliged to leave little Lilly alone, Hilda being engaged at Mr. Pinch and Company's, and there being no stranger she could call on to remain with the child. A sore trial this was to the devoted nurse, and nothing but the absolute necessity of the case would have persuaded her to the measure; though Lilly herself, in her desire to relieve the anxiety of her sister, made light of being thus left.

With everything arranged in the best possible way for the comfort and well-doing of the little girl, Mabel gave her a parting kiss, and hurried off, locking the door of the room upon the outside, and carrying with her the key.

Arrived at Mrs. Hagges's, she rang the door-bell and was admitted by a neat-looking servant-woman into the hall, where the latter left her to announce her presence to her mistress. In a little while Mrs. Hagges appeared accompanied by Miss Lizie, who wore on this occasion a look of pride and consequence, which sat with peculiar unbecomingness upon her doll-like face. Mrs. Hagges herself appeared fluttered beyond anything Mabel had yet seen in her, and painfully embarrassed beside. Following in the wake of the two ladies came the servant-woman, carrying a bundle of new linen; and, having come up to Mabel, Mrs. Hagges took the bundle from her attendant and presented it to her visitor, saying, —

“Here's the work I promised you, young woman. It's all cut out, and it's only pillar-cases, besides; so you can't go wrong.”

Mabel thanked her, adding that she could not name any exact day for having the work finished, as on the condition of her little sister depended her leisure to devote herself to it, but that she would certainly bring it home so soon as it was done.

The doll looked impatient at this explanation,

and interrupted her mother on the point of reply, to say, "the young woman might take long as she liked at it; the only thing was she wasn't to look for any more, as her ma wasn't wanting work done at all, and only gave her that out of charity."

Mabel took no notice of the doll, but repeated her thanks to the mother, and hurried off with her work. The words of Miss Lizie had sunk deep within her, however. She was to look for no more work; the bundle she carried was all she had secured, though more than a morning was spent in solicitation. With a great effort, Mabel threw off the momentary despondency this disappointment caused her, and, with a heart still kept light by the hope she would not let falter, hastened home to her little charge.

Lilly had done well as could be looked for during her absence, and made no murmur of complaint concerning the trial she had been put to. As she put her arms about Mabel's neck, however, with the welcoming kiss, a pent-up sob burst from her that was eloquent in expression of all she had suffered. Still she spoke no word; nor did Mabel, as she pressed the poor child to her breast, and

kissed, again and again, the marble-like brow that rested against her.

Upon looking over the linen she had brought from Mrs. Haggess's, Mabel found she had received something like three or four dollars' worth of work. This was more than she had looked for as the first offer, but it presented no very encouraging prospect, knowing it was to be followed by no more. Making the best of her leisure time, — for Lilly had that day more than one turn of great suffering, — and working through most of the night hours, the young sewer got her pillow-cases finished to take home early Saturday morning.

"Never mind if it is the last from Mrs. Haggess's, Mabel," Hilda remarked, when about to leave home that morning for her place of labor; "you'll get work somewhere else, and one person's job is good as another. This is the end of my week at Pinch's, and I'll bring home good pay to-night, and for many a Saturday to come, too, I wouldn't wonder, for the advertisement's in the paper still. And with my pay and yours for the pillow-cases, we'll have money enough for next month's rent secured."

Leaving her little patient as she had done before, Mabel repaired, for the third time, to the residence of Mrs. Haggis.

The servant-woman admitted her into the hall, took from her the bundle of linen, and sententiously asked how much the work was worth. Mabel answered three dollars four shillings, and the woman, having given her a stare, departed upstairs with the bundle. In a few minutes, she reappeared, followed by Miss Lizie. The young lady's morning toilet was showy and becoming. With her bright eyes, fine complexion, flowing drapery, and rich jewelry (Miss Lizie evidently saw nothing unsuitable in diamonds worn with a *robe-de-chambre*), she carried about her a radiance of glitter and beauty, which must quite have bewildered Mabel, all unaccustomed to close contact with such splendor, but that, young as she was, our sewing-girl had learned to look so closely for the *earnest* in life. The beauty of *truth* and *worth* was all that touched her, and Miss Lizie, robed in her splendor, was to her but a beautiful, glittering toy.

"Ma is not home," said the pretty doll, sweeping up to where Mabel stood, "and she told me to pay

you what I thought your work was worth. Three dollars four shillings is mighty high for four pair of pillow-cases ! Dear me ! why, three dollars is more than they're worth ; for it's six shillings a pair. I'll pay you two dollars six shillings ; and that's almost too much."

There was too great need for that money at home for Mabel not to make an effort for it.

" I should not ask more than six shillings a pair if they were plain cases, even very large ones, as they are," she said ; " but their all having ruffings makes a good deal more work."

" Well, but two dollars six shillings is plenty for them, for all that," rejoined the little beauty. " Besides," she yawningly added, " it's all I have down with me, and it's not worth my while to go up again just for six shillings."

Oh ! had she no heart to think what that "*just six shillings*" might be to the poor sewing girl ?

Mabel looked wistfully into the beautiful eyes of Miss Lizie ; but she saw no *heart* there, — nothing to encourage her to further effort, and suppressing a sigh, she accepted from the jewelled fingers the two dollars six shillings, and turned to go.

“Remember ma has no more work for you,” a little pertly, said the doll, as Mabel’s hand was on the door-knob. “She never *will* have any more for *you*; so you needn’t come again.”

Thus dismissed, Mabel left the house.

Just as she was about turning out of the avenue a showy carriage drew up to the curb near her, and a plump kidded hand beckoned her from the window. Mabel was passing on; for she could not at first believe it was to her the occupant of the fine carriage was motioning. A second look, however, assured her that the person within was no other than the mistress of the house she had just quitted, and she approached the window, as invited.

“I’m so glad I got to see you!” exclaimed the good-hearted Mrs. Haggis. “Most like you’ve been taking home the piller-cases?”

Mabel replied that she had just left them at the house, with the lady’s daughter.

“And did she pay you the price you asked?” rather anxiously inquired Mrs. Haggis.

“She paid me two dollars six shillings, ma’am. My price was three dollars four shillings.”

“And it’s three dollars four you shall have.”

rejoined the good woman, taking out her portmonnaie. "My daughter, you see, was put out by my talking to you that day, and she told Mr. Hagges about it, and so there was trouble. I can't give you any more work because of it," she added, having placed the six shillings in Mabel's hand; "but I can send you to some one who maybe will. Here's my visiting card;" and she took one from a gold-chased case, and handed it to Mabel, "and you can take it to Mrs. Graith's, number ——, Michigan Avenue. She's a very charitable person, — that is, she's head of all the society ladies of Chicago, and president of a big sewing and industrious society that's top of all the rest. If she takes a fancy to do it, she can give you a big lift. You'd best write the name and number on the card, so there'll be no mistake."

She handed Mabel a small pencil, and the young girl put down the name and number as directed.

"While you're about it, you'd best write something more," observed Mrs. Hagges: "'Please give the young woman some sewing, as she's in need of help.'"

"I'd rather you'd write that yourself, Mrs. Hag-

ges," said Mabel. "It would be better coming from you."

Mrs. Hagges looked embarrassed. Her eyes glanced from Mabel's face to an uncertain point in the distance, then fell upon her own hands in their tightly-fitting yellow gloves.

"I can't write for having my gloves on," she said, "but your putting it down's all the same."

Without suspicion of the true cause of Mrs. Hagges's refusal, Mabel wrote the words suggested; then, with thanks to her kind benefactress, she turned her steps in the direction of number —, Michigan Avenue. Mrs. Graith was about going to a meeting of one of her many "societies." She informed Mabel of the fact; but added, that as she had a few minutes to spare, she was willing to talk with her concerning the peculiarities of her — Mabel's "case."

The lady had a singular number of questions to ask, and, while Mabel was answering them, fixed on her so scrutinizing a look, that the young girl was satisfied she had, in some way, incurred her peculiar suspicion. But she was mistaken. Mrs. Graith did not regard her with *more* suspicion than she did every individual of what she called "the

poor class," who came under her notice. It was her wont to start in each case with a whole host of suspicions, which, had they been put into so many words, would, most probably, quite have shocked herself. These suspicions, or "misgivings," as she called them, it became the duty of each person brought before her charitable notice to do away with in the most satisfactory manner, before he or she could be deemed worthy of the lady's faintest sympathy or assistance. Without being aware of it, she reversed the method of some person, real or imaginary, to whom she made frequent reference under the title of "my injudicious friend." This injudicious friend, it would appear, started off, in each case presented her, under the fixed impression that the individual in question was possessed of every possible virtue until it was satisfactorily, or rather *unsatisfactorily* — proved to her that the individual was, in fact, possessed of every possible vice. Thus, with Mrs. Graith, every one was open to suspicion of every *vice*, until proved to be blessed with every *virtue*.

The first of Mrs. Graith's inquisitorial remarks bore reference to the card presented her by Mabel.

"I presume I am to understand that Mrs. Hag-

ges herself wrote these lines of recommendation," she said, with her keen gaze upon the young girl.

"No, ma'am," Mabel replied, unsuspecting of the trap set to catch her; "Mrs. Hagges had her gloves on, and told me to write them."

Mrs. Graith smiled a little quiet smile to herself, then took a second look at the card, after which, the inquisitorial order of things was fairly instituted. Through this, she learned everything relating to her visitor and her visitor's family that Mabel chose she should know, privately set down in her own mind as fact a good many more, and guessed or suspected many more still. She didn't like Mabel being so handsome, yet acknowledged, even to her own suspicious self, that there was nothing about her which looked like a consciousness of her beauty; "but then," — as her reasoning went on, — "these people do get to be so cunning."

"I shall take your case into consideration," at length said the lady, consulting her watch. "I'm going just now to a meeting of 'the ladies of Chicago's Society for Promotion of Honest Industry,' and will lay all the matter you have given me before the committee of investigation. X

everything is satisfactory, there will be a vote taken upon your case, and if the vote is in your favor, after that, we will see what can be done for your assistance." *

Mabel opened her eyes at this.

"You understand, ma'am," she said, "that it is simply work, needle-work, I apply for?"

"Certainly; that is understood. But we cannot give our work indiscriminately to every applicant. The most deserving are to be assisted first; the *really* deserving only, at any time. 'The ladies of Chicago's Society for Promotion of Honest Industry' is a society upon which too many eyes are fixed to permit its members to be any other than the most watchful and careful advocates of right and virtue. Indeed, it is quite terrible to see how many institutions of this sort, through want of this very watchfulness and caution, promote evil rather than good."

Mabel had moved slowly to the door.

"When shall I call again, ma'am?" she asked.

"I really cannot say, — that is, I cannot say when I am likely to give you work; but you might call in about two weeks' time to learn what progress is making in your case."

At the words "two weeks' time," poor Mabel's heart sank. How near would such delay bring them to another rent-day! Visions of the brutal house-agent rose before her fancy, — old Brumbley and poor little Lilly! Such thought made her bold.

"Try and let me have something soon as possible, Mrs. Graith," she earnestly said. "Indeed — indeed, it would be no mistaken kindness in my case. I have told you our peculiar position — our poor little sister" —

Mrs. Graith looked coldly and with some aggravation of suspicion upon her. The girl looked so handsome when she spoke with that light in her eye! — there was such an air about her! — she looked so excited! Mrs. Graith *didn't like it*. She was really afraid, — well, she'd have to be very, *very* cautious.

"All will be done in good time and in proper form," she replied, in a tone quite as cold as her look. "Our society cannot be hurried or put out of its way for any individual case to the detriment of others. There is, I believe, some fault found with us on this score," pursued the lady, "by certain persons, ignorant of how such things should

be managed ; but we know our own business, and don't trouble ourselves about them. Once in a while, it happens that some little matter turns up seeming to favor this idea of our being somewhat too deliberate in our movements. For instance, there was a case, last winter, of two girls being frozen to death one particularly cold night ; and as it was well known we had had their case under consideration for about a couple of weeks, it was thought, by some, that we might have determined on something in time to save them. But this was altogether a mistaken impression. Our society is bound by excellent laws and by-laws, and all the members are judicious ladies, who feel no disposition to oppose them. There are no hot-heads among us. All are cool-headed and prudent. Yes, fortunately for the honor of our society and the persons we labor to assist, no one can say that, in a single instance, either rashness or imprudent haste has been exhibited by any of our members."

Mabel could not but think by what different names *she* would have styled the speed which would be mercy to her and to many another suffering one ; but she said nothing further. The

president of "The Ladies of Chicago's Society for Promotion of Honest Industry" of course knew her business best, and no appeal could be made from her decision.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MR. PINCH AND COMPANY.



HAT evening Hilda returned from her week's employ at the Lake-street store. As Mabel heard her step ascending the stair, she in part anticipated the tidings brought her. Between Hilda's *heart* and *heels* a peculiar sympathy manifested itself; and her sister, in this instance, as in many a former one, judged of the one by the other. In fact the young girl's step dragged wearily enough on her approach to the presence of her loved Mabel and little Lilly, and when she finally presented herself in the room, her countenance bore evidence of the heavy heart within.

"O Mabel! Mabel!" she said, as she threw herself down beside her sisters, "I'm not going to despond, I'm not going to give way to disappointment, but the temptation's greater than I ever felt yet! I did so hope to have something

worth bringing home to you!—everything *did* seem so fair and promising!—this Mr. Pinch (he's well named, he'd *pinch* any poor girl black and blue to get work out of her; he's pinched hundreds till their hearts ache, this very week!), he put such a splendid advertisement in the paper; and he has such a fine store; and he spoke so gentlemanly and fair! why, who could think"—She stopped, covered her cold hands over her face, and burst into passionate weeping.

"My poor, poor Hilda!" said Mabel, twining her arms about her, "don't give up to trouble this way. It was such a good resolve you made not to despond, you know; stand by it, my sister,—stand by it!"

"The disappointment's mostly for *you*, Mabel,—you and darling Lilly," sobbed the poor girl. "I wanted to help you,—to do my share, you know,—to—to let you see I was willing to—to make some sacrifice"—

Mabel drew the head of her sister down upon her breast, and pressing her own warm cheek against the cold one, now all bedewed with tears, whispered,—

"To let me see you were willing to make a sac-

rice, Hilda? Don't I know you have sold your nice dress and shawl to *pay our rent*? — the only decent clothes you had, my sister! — the only things fit to keep out the cold of this bleak winter! — O Hilda! Hilda!”

The young girl raised her head and looked into her sister's face.

“You've found it out, Mabel! you've missed them from the closet?”

“Yes, my darling, true, true sister! I know now how Brumbley was paid; I've discovered your secret.”

“And you're crying! — why, Mabel! how unlike you.”

“At the thought of your loss, my sister, can I help it? Look at this miserable dress you have on, — this poor worn sack, — are they fit for trying weather like this? Those things were so good! they would have lasted you, — they made so much of your comfort and respectability.”

“And, Mabel, they were better, far better than anything *you* had, and so I really had no right to them. No, Mabel dear, every time I put on that dress and shawl I felt them a reproach to me, and, until this disappointment at Pinch's, I have seemed

happier and lighter since they were gone. Mabel! Mabel! on the alternate Sunday when you went to church, dressed in those old, faded clothes, I've thought of myself the Sunday before, with that fine glossy black merino, and comfortable shawl, and almost hated myself that they were mine. Could I have persuaded you to wear the shawl, Mabel, it would have been something, but you wouldn't, — and now it's done its last good service for us both. I don't regret it, — I never shall regret it; it's been in my mind like a beginning of better things for me, Mabel; so you must make light of it, as I do."

"I never, never can make light of it, my Hilda," replied Mabel, as she once more laid her cheek to her sister's. "It has grieved me, yet made me happy, too."

"Mabel! it was worth doing, if only to have you say that, and look so approvingly."

"Come, Hilda dear, and let me kiss you, too!" put in little Lilly's plaintive voice. "You've paid the rent with your only good dress and shawl," she added, as she twined her arms about her sister's neck, — "you've kept away that ugly, cruel Mr. Brumbley, so he can't, *for a whole month*,

take my bed and turn me out! Good, good Hilda!"

"My darling! I'd part with anything — my very life, to save you from that terrible thing again."

"You shall have all my peaches!" cried the child, quickly, "you and Mabel, that are so good, and only have dry bread and potatoes; the peaches shan't be kept for me any more, — you shall have them all."

She ceased, and her eyes grew solemn — as they remained fixed on those of Hilda; then, drawing the head of the latter close to her breast, she whispered: —

"Yes, Hilda, we're all right *for a month*, and — but don't tell Mabel — I sometimes think, *after* that I shall never want but a little bed under — you know? beside father's and mother's, with grass growing over, and a pretty mountain-ash for shade."

Hilda raised her head, with a startled look into the pale, wan little face, so like death already, only for the "pain-lines," as Lilly's "good angel" had said; then strained the child again to her breast. Had it come to her for the first time the thought

how surely the precious one was passing from them? Was it a new picture presented her, the little grass-grown mound beside that one where already slept the parents "gone before"?

"Hush, hush, Hilda! don't let Mabel hear! Don't cry, neither, Hilda; for it don't make *me* cry. I often think of it, and *never* cry. The pains, you know, are so bad! and then we're so very, very poor; and dear Mabel has such a hard time with me. And so, altogether, darling, when I think of our good, kind Saviour, ready to take me and stop my pains, and dear mother, and the other good angels, why—why, it don't seem it could come a bit too soon."

It may be well to state here the circumstances of Hilda's disappointment in the firm of Pinch and Company. Mr. Pinch had promised the applicants for employment brought to his store by his advertisement a fair,—nay, a high price for their labor. Although no amount was specified, each poor girl was willing to believe that the promises held out would be fulfilled,—that a firm of such *respectability* would scorn to defraud poor, unprotected sewing-girls.

These poor girls were required to work ten

hours a day, and expected to make twenty-five pairs of overalls in that time. Hard work and close hours! but then the *pay* was to be good, and this was an incentive that nerved each to her task. In the home of each there was a grim necessity that permitted no thought of rest, however the overtaxed frame required it, — no thought to spare muscle or sinew. The struggle was for the bread to eat and the rag to wear, and these must be had — oh, yes! they *must* be had — at any cost of unrest and toil.

Saturday evening came, and nearly a hundred expectant girls crowded waiting for their pay. Mr. Pinch's foreman presented himself, and went through the settling up business to the last applicant. Some received one dollar and fifty cents, others two dollars, as a remuneration for six days' work; a little over *one cent* for the making of each pair of overalls!

One among that crowd of disappointed souls dared to raise her voice in remonstrance. It was poor Hilda. She spoke to Mr. Pinch himself, — she said to him that the small sum paid was insufficient to procure the common necessities of life.

Mr. Pinch stared and shrugged his shoulders.

With that shrug he threw from his respectable self, and from other members of his honorable firm, all stigma of reproach. His foreman, he said, had made out the bills, and the foreman alone was responsible. Nor was it any business of his, Mr. Pinch's, whether or not the sum paid was adequate to expenses of living; that was the affair of the girls themselves, not his.

Said Hilda to her sister, in conclusion, "I know now, Mabel, why I didn't find Mary Griffin and the other girls I know there when I went. They commenced working on Friday, and when they found out, Saturday evening, the deception that had been put on them, of course they went no more to the store. But what difference does their staying away, or will my staying away, make to this Pinch and Company! They'll still find plenty of poor girls to answer their advertisement, and to work for them, till the first Saturday evening has come and gone; then *they* will stay away, to make room for still others." Hilda was silent awhile, then added, "And now, Mabel, I'm again without work! — with all my trying, and hoping, I'm but better off one dollar and four shillings than I was

this day last week. Perhaps it would have been better to stay even at Pinch's than have no place at all?"

"No, my sister, you shall go there no more. You have had a hard week of toil, and we must try and get you something, if not easier, at least that will better compensate you for your labor. To-morrow you will have that Sabbath-day rest you need so much, and on Monday can look round again. I shall make efforts myself on Monday, among my old employers, and do not doubt I shall find something to bring home with me, or, at least, the promise of something. I have a dollar and seven shillings still in hand, and if we are both successful on Monday, there will soon be more coming in. Then next Thursday week, you remember, I go to Mrs. Graith again; and as I do not fear but our characters will stand all the investigation of the society, I feel quite confident of getting steady work from that time. Make yourself easy, dear Hilda, for we shall be able to keep the 'wolf from the door!'"

Hilda glanced up quickly from the sewing she was engaged on, — the mending of another old

dress which was to help take the place of the good one she had parted with.

“ ‘ *The wolf from the door!* ’ ” she repeated. “ *We* have a wolf more savage and cruel than ever walked on four legs to keep off, Mabel, — old Brumbley.”

“ He is never out of my thoughts,” rejoined her sister, in a lower tone, and with a glance in the direction of the bed. “ Still, Hilda, our future does not look unpromising. We have time to recover ourselves; and that is everything.”

“ But how fast the weeks fly round, Mabel! — almost one already gone in our new month! ”

“ But in little more than one more there is every likelihood of my securing steady customer work.”

Hilda glanced up again, hesitated, then once more resumed her sewing.

“ I don’t want to discourage you, Mabel,” she said, at length, yielding to an impulse she appeared unable to resist, “ but I don’t hang the faintest hope on that ‘ soqiety ’ of Mrs. Graith’s! and when I see *you* looking for so much from it, I know you’ll be disappointed. I’ve heard all about it since you were there; and didn’t mean to tell you, only I *must*. They say that out of a dozen who

apply for aid, and come with the best sort of recommendations for character and everything else, not more than one is taken in hand by the members of the society, and perhaps that one only after waiting till all hope is dying out. The ladies of the society are so particular, that it is almost as easy for a 'camel to pass through the eye of a needle,' as for a poor girl like you, however good she may be, to pass their laws and investigations. No, no, Mabel! I can hang some hope on our efforts of Monday, though we have failed in such things before, but none on your chances of success with Mrs. Graith and her 'society.' "

CHAPTER XXXVL

THE AID SOCIETY.



PARTIAL success attended the efforts of both the sisters on the Monday morning, — Mabel procuring a small supply of work from one of her old customers, and Hilda from Mrs. Powers, the person with whom they formerly lodged.

Mrs. Powers received the young girl so kindly as quite touched Hilda, who had almost expected to be forgotten by her old landlady, and gave her work that she had intended to do herself. In fact, knowing that Mrs. Powers was altogether accustomed to do her own sewing, Hilda had scarcely thought it possible her visit to her would result in procuring the aid she so much needed.

“It’s after all, those who have known trouble themselves, who the most feel for others,” was the reflection of the young girl, as she hurried home with her precious parcel. “Poor Mrs. Powers!

she has the time to give to this work, and scarcely the money to pay for it being done."

Late on Tuesday afternoon Mabel had completed the task she had allotted herself; and, leaving her little Lilly to the care of Hilda, she went to carry it home.

The person by whom the work was given her lived a considerable distance from Polk street, and Mabel was some time on the road, though she made all possible speed. Her employer was from home when the young girl arrived there; but being informed she was expected back in a short time, Mabel concluded to await her coming, not wishing to return another time for the pay.

The short time named lengthened itself to nearly an hour; and, after that, a good deal of delay was made through the proprietor looking over the work, and demurring about the price to be paid for it. Mabel's demand was for a dollar and three shillings, which her employer thought too much. The latter finally dismissed her with nine shillings, as she might as well have done at first, since she had quite resolved to bring the amount to what satisfied herself.

Upon glancing at the time-piece in the hall, as

she was about to leave, Mabel was dismayed to find it nearly eight o'clock.

Wrapping her cloak closely as possible about her, for it was a particularly cold evening, and she had become warm through her long stay in the house, she hurried along briskly as she could, thinking of little Lilly disappointed at taking her supper without her, and of her own disappointment at carrying with her two shillings short of the money she had looked for. Only *two shillings*? Yes; but the comparatively little sum was much to this poor girl, — so much that the absence of it from her little port-monnaie made the cold air which pierced her scant cloak seem more stinging to her, the good, hoping heart within her breast less light.

She had proceeded but a few squares, when a gentleman about passing turned and looked in her face, then paused and joined her. It was young Ralph Barrett.

“Miss Ross! is it possible?” he said; “so late, and I expect, too, quite far from your home?”

In as few words as possible, Mabel, who had slackened her pace, explained that she had been detained; then, adding that she was in much haste, endeavored to pass on.

Young Barrett, however, either did not perceive her desire to avoid him, or chose to disregard it, for he quickened his steps with her own, and remarked that there was no occasion to distress herself by so much haste, as he would certainly accompany her home.

"There is no need," Mabel coldly rejoined, abruptly pausing. "Indeed, Mr. Barrett, I insist that you go no further with me."

Ralph began something about her long walk, and the lateness of the hour, but Mabel interrupted him, —

"You forget, Mr. Barrett," she said, "that I am but a poor sewing-girl, and that, like others, I must get accustomed to such inconveniences. I beg you will leave me!"

"Pray let me accompany you," he rejoined quite earnestly. "I have been wishing to learn your residence on account of my mother. I believe she wishes to write, — to send to you" —

Mabel stopped once more, and said, in a tone so firm as to admit of no further question, "I shall certainly continue my walk alone, Mr. Barrett. I insist, too, that you do not follow me."

With these words said, she hurried forward, in-

finitely relieved to perceive no footsteps in her wake.

The Thursday week came round, and Mabel went to visit Mrs. Graith. She had been able to procure but very little sewing in the meanwhile, — so little that, the hope of this lady failing her, she knew not from whence was to come money for the next coal, — in a day or two wanting, — or to keep herself and Hilda in the bread and potatoes, long their only fare, or, worse than all, poor little Lilly in the medicine and food necessary for her existence.

Hilda had been rather more successful than herself; for, through the efforts of Mrs. Powers, she had been kept in a tolerably good supply of coarser work, such as their old landlady could procure from her own humble friends.

The lady-president was in her library at the time of Mabel's coming, engaged in writing up minutes of the last meeting of the "Society of the Ladies of Chicago for Promotion of Honest Industry," the secretary of that society being indisposed.

Into this apartment, her name having first been carried to Mrs. Graith by the servant, Mabel was shown.

The lady-president sat formally at her secretary, her gold pen in her hand, quite a formidable number of business-like-looking blank-books before her, and an expression of severity on her countenance that made it appear yet more forbidding than upon the occasion of Mabel's former visit.

From the moment her cold, stern eye fell upon the young sewing-girl, all hope of receiving the aid she so much needed deserted poor Mabel. This was crushing enough; but she was unprepared for the more crushing decision to which the "judicious committee which had considered her case" had come.

It has been said that the lady-president cast a stern eye upon her young visitor. She accompanied the look with no word, only resting her hand with the gold pen in a way that seemed to promise some words should presently follow, and bracing her form to a yet more rigid formality. Perhaps she was mercifully unwilling that the whole weight of her condemnation should fall at once upon its victim, and thus gave Mabel opportunity to surmise from her look what was to follow.

It was Mabel who first spoke.

“ You said I might call again in a couple of weeks, Mrs. Graith.”

“ Yes ; and I am glad you have come. The sooner so painful a business is gotten through with the better. Mabel Ross ! ” and the voice of the lady-president took a declamatory tone, “ for two weeks the valuable time of the members of our society has been taken up in investigating the character of yourself and your sister, and in looking into the surroundings of your present position. Fortunately for the prevention of further time being wasted on objects entirely unworthy our humane consideration, a discovery has at this early stage been made which settles further question. You were seen on the evening of Tuesday week, — by two persons of undoubted veracity, — in company with a young man, named Ralph Barrett ; and, as this young man’s character is quite below a questionable one, and he also occupies a position in wealth and society which makes it impossible he should seek your company with any justifiable motive, your being seen together is quite enough to stigmatize you as entirely unworthy the patronage of the ‘ Society of the Ladies of Chicago for Promotion of *Honest Industry.* ’ ”

For a moment the unhappy Mabel was so discomposed by this turning to her discredit the annoyance to which she had been subjected by young Barrett that she was without power to speak. Soon as she could in a manner recover herself, she hastened to make explanation of the facts as they were, — her face pale and her voice trembling with agitation.

“ Believe me, the facts are just as I have stated,” she said, in conclusion ; “ and, had the persons who saw me in company with Mr. Barrett taken the trouble to observe a little more, — as, oh, surely they *should* have done when the character of a poor girl was at stake ! — they would have learned that I considered his joining me an intrusion, and that I positively prohibited his accompanying me further.”

“ I am not prepared to say I consider you a positively vicious girl, Mabel Ross,” rejoined Mrs. Graith ; “ nor have the committee come to such a conclusion ; but you certainly are a particularly imprudent one ; and we feel that being so, you have put an affront upon our society by soliciting its favor as a reliable young person. Like many another, you have been enticed by the notice of

a young man of means, like Ralph Barrett, and believed he thought of elevating you to his own position. Vanity and a wish to get above the cares of a sewing-girl have induced you to encourage advances positively ruinous to your reputation."

"Oh, don't — don't judge me so harshly!" exclaimed poor Mabel. "I assure you, from the hour of my dear mother's death, I have had no thought but to make an honest livelihood for myself and those dependent on me, and to set a fair example to my younger sisters. Think this over again, Mrs. Graith, and in mercy give me the work I so much need! You have a daughter of your own, — some chance might impoverish her, as I and my sisters have been impoverished, — you would wish strangers to look kindly upon her" —

"Rich or poor, *my* daughter could never be tempted to make a companion of a young man of the character of Ralph Barrett!" proudly rejoined Mrs. Graith. "Though unable, through the duties of my office, to attend personally to her training, I have placed her in hands I can confidently rely on. The lady you saw her with is her governess, Madam Jonvois, and a person of the highest

principles and refinement of character. Don't speak to me of *my* daughter, Mabel Ross ! for there are *no circumstances* which could place her in a position parallel to the one you occupy at present."

Notwithstanding the crushing weight of this reply, Mabel's despair gave her courage to try one more appeal to the obdurate lady.

"Mrs. Graith, you say you don't think any positive ill of me," she said ; "can you not then give me aid, if not for myself, for the poor child, — God knows, perhaps dying ! — who at five years old is helpless as a babe, and altogether dependent on my efforts ? I see your Bible beside you, ma'am, and you tell me your society is for the encouragement of virtue among the suffering and needy ; surely then you are a good woman, and a good woman *must* feel for those suffering as we are ! Think of the little sister left me by a dying mother, — that child suffering in a way terrible to see, and with a near prospect of being without a home and without the necessaries of life ! Think of *her* only ; think not of *me* ; and surely, surely you will see that, even were I the vicious person you acknowledge you do not think me, *that child* claims your pity as

a Christian woman ! I have but two shillings for present use and no immediate prospect of getting more ; my rent will soon be due ; my little coal is almost exhausted ; but two shillings are between us all and want of bread ! Give me—oh, give me work, Mrs. Graith ! In mercy, and to prevent such misery as you know not of, give me work !”

Mrs. Graith was shaken out of none of her rigidity by this appeal. What more she said was to prove her still inexorable. The committee had considered “ the case,” and the ladies of the society never “ went back,” as the lady-president expressed it, over a decision.

“ We do nothing in a hurry,” she said ; “ we act discreetly, and make sure of our ground before we act ; and to change our decision would imply that we have acted with injudicious haste. Yours may be a hard case, Mabel Ross ; but not harder than a great many others that come under our notice, and that we have to deal with according to our laws and by-laws. The members of the ‘ Society of the Ladies of Chicago for Promotion of Honest Industry ’ will be firm to their *principles*, whatever individual suffering may be the result.”

How Mabel got home she scarcely knew ; but,

arrived there, she threw her arms about the neck of Hilda, and gave way to the tears until now suppressed. Hilda was almost frightened to see her patiently-abiding sister acting in a manner so contrary to her usual habit. Through soothing and questioning, she presently drew from the weeping girl the cause of her distress.

"She's a cruel, hard-hearted, hypocritical, and selfishly-absurd woman!" Hilda exclaimed, forgetting, in her indignation, that moderation of speech she had resolved upon. "I expected no help from her and her society, but never dreamed of such an affront as this! It makes my blood boil, Mabel, to think of her daring to cast suspicion upon a pure-minded girl like you!"

"What I think so hard," sobbed poor Mabel, "is, that, though she allowed she doesn't think really ill of me, she wouldn't give me work, even for the sake of poor Lilly. O Hilda! what an unhappy chance was Ralph Barrett's meeting me that Tuesday evening! But for that, I should have got plenty of work, and all would have gone well with us."

"Another wrong to lay to the score of the Barretts!" exclaimed Hilda. "You look reprov-

ingly, Mabel ; but I'm too new in self-discipline to be always prepared with the right words. Perhaps this Ralph Barrett has meant no harm ; perhaps his mother is not the selfish, hard woman she seems ; but appearances are against them, and I can't help but see it and feel it."

Mabel had ceased her weeping. She placed her hand gently on that of Hilda.

"Say or feel nothing, dear Hilda, that looks like bearing malice or ill-will," she said. "If they have meant us wrong, there is another than us to take count of it. O my sister ! we are so momentarily at God's mercy, looking so anxiously each hour for his help ! Let us do nothing that may lessen his pity for us, — that may tempt him, for our chastisement, to let the burden press yet harder upon us."

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE WOLF AT THE DOOR.



AY upon day of anxious care, not knowing from whence the bread of the morrow was to come ; a little lessening of the weight at the heart through getting of some little work, which, in turn, was to bring some little money ; the investment of that little money in coal, which, *for a time*, would keep off the pinching cold, or in bread, which, *for a time*, would keep off pinching hunger.

So sped the days with Mabel and Hilda ; each striving in affection to keep up the hope and lessen the burden of the other ; both uniting in efforts to relieve the misery of the helpless child, whose hours of pain were rendered more trying through new privations.

One morning, Mabel had remained from home longer than she now often did. When she returned, it was with a bundle of linen under her arm.

"Work?" exclaimed Hilda. "O Mabel! how well that is, just when we want it more — oh, yes, more than ever!"

"We are not the only ones suffering, Hilda," Mabel said, as she put off her hat and cloak. "I have been to cousin Algin's."

Hilda looked strangely, and ran some crooked stitches in a spread she was quilting.

"You never got work from there," she observed, not raising her eyes from the spread.

"No; I got it from Mrs. Willis. I didn't go to cousin Algin's for work, but on account of the distress she is in."

This time, Hilda ceased her quilting to look up.

"Yes, Hilda, cousin Algin is in great grief. Two of her darling little girls are dead, — Lyddie and Rose. I met the nursery girl, and she told me; so I went round at once. They died from the effects of scarlet fever. They were taken ill the evening of the day you were there, and Eva and Kate were taken afterward. Eva and Kate are ill now, — dangerously ill."

Hilda had become deadly pale. She sat staring at her sister, never so much as moving a finger,

her hands spread out on her work, where she had let them fall.

Mabel regarded her in surprise.

"Lyddie and Rose were your favorites, Hilda," she said; "you thought dear little Rose so like our own Lilly. I didn't see cousin Algin; but Ellen — you remember that good girl — says she never saw even a stricken mother suffer as she does. She never leaves the room where poor little Eva and Kate are lying, and scarcely moves from their bedside. May God spare these two to her! Poor, poor cousin Algin!"

Hilda gave a convulsive sob; then, suddenly rising, fell trembling on her sister's neck.

"O Mabel, Mabel!" she said; "it was only a coincidence, — surely, surely, it was nothing more. Mabel! *say* it was nothing more! I want to hear you say that!"

"What do you mean, Hilda?" and Mabel looked anxiously on the agitated face raised to her own. "Explain to me, my sister."

"Mabel, I said such things to cousin Algin that morning! I told her how God might visit on her, through her children, her wrongs to us. I was excited, — I was angry, she seemed so cold and

cruel. And *now*, Mabel, I feel — oh, I *fear*, God has replied to my words in this dreadful, dreadful way! Darling little Rose! sweet little Lyddie! — dead! — both dead! O Mabel!

Mabel spoke not a word. She folded her arms closer about the trembling Hilda, and solemnly raised her eyes, looking beyond the confines of that little room to the seat of awful might and justice, where sat the Ruler of all.

“Mabel! Mabel! say something, — say you don’t think it was *that*!”

“God is just, my sister, — just and all-seeing. He needs not to be reminded.”

“No, Mabel; and yet the feeling is *here* still.”

She paused for a moment, then added, —

“Rose and Lyddie are gone; but *two* are left yet. Mabel, let us pray God to leave her these two, — pretty Eva! little baby Kate!”

Hilda’s voice had sunk to a whisper; and, as she ceased speaking, she dropped on her knees and drew Mabel down beside her.

“The poor little feet are so cold, Hilda. Have you been down again to the first floor? Were

Mrs. Moppit at home, I know she would let us have a little coal."

"I was down three minutes ago, while you were heating up the water, Mabel. Everything is tightly closed as ever."

Little Lilly opened her eyes.

"Mrs. Moppit not come home yet?" she said; "and her visitor's forgotten us, too!"

"No, darling, not forgotten us;" and Mabel assumed a tone of cheerfulness she did not feel. "You know we heard she was sick; and that's why she's not been again to see us. I was only sorry about Mrs. Moppit because I wanted to borrow some coal to keep a better fire going. There's such a bitter night come on, or what we had would have lasted us better."

"I feel it's cold," said the poor child, in a plaintive tone. "It's my feet are the worst, Mabel."

Mabel put her hands under the covers, and rubbed the little feet briskly, and after a while the child said they were easier.

"They shan't get cold again, Lilly dear," said Hilda; "for I'll lie quite close and keep them warm."

She threw herself upon the bed, and, clasping Lilly's feet under the covers, pressed them closely to her breast.

"There's one thing, Mabel," she whispered, "the cold's kept *the wolf off*, — you know."

"Yes," was the whispered reply, with an uneasy glance at the child, who had again closed her eyes, "there is mercy in the change! It is little more than six o'clock, to be sure; but, early or late, he will scarcely want to be abroad such a night."

"We're clear of him for this time, Mabel! That little money you've been saving for him will go for coal and bread to-morrow. He'd not have taken it anyhow; for he refused twice as much last month."

"But it would have been something to offer him," replied Mabel. "And then we could have let him take the carpet for what it is worth."

"It's worth the full rent, Mabel; yet no one would give us a dollar for it. *He'd* not have let it stand against a dollar of the rent. But there's one thing I've wondered at your not parting with, either in pawn or to sell;" and Hilda turned her eyes to the sewing-machine, which stood carefully covered in the corner of the room.

"The thought of that has been in my mind a hundred times, Hilda. We cannot part with it. To pawn it would be to part with it forever for the merest trifle. We are too poor to redeem anything. Remember the watch. Its sale would but bring us a trifle, too, when compared with the price paid for it — ten — fifteen dollars, at most. Then, though out of use at present, it is our 'stock in trade,' and an important one. Lilly may get better, — we may be able to use it, — no, Hilda! we cannot part with our sewing-machine."

Hilda suddenly raised her finger. There was a sound below.

It was the street-door opening, and it presently closed again; after which all was quiet as before. The sisters had exchanged an anxious glance, but the quiet reassured them.

"It must be Mrs. Moppit's got back," whispered Hilda, drawing a long breath. "I think I just heard her door unlocking."

"You will presently go down and see, Hilda. You think she has coal?"

"Oh, I'm quite sure of it! She got in a supply just before I missed her."

A minute or so passed, and Hilda was thinking

it about time to make a visit below for the coal, when, without preliminary of any sort, there came a faint rap at the door of the room.

Mabel and Hilda started, and exchanged another anxious look, while little Lilly reopened her eyes, and glanced uneasily from one to the other.

It was not at all like *the wolf*; yet thought of him was apparent in the mind of each. Indeed, Mrs. Moppit, if returned, was disabled through her lameness from mounting the steep stairs; who then could it be but the house-agent?

No second rap followed; but the door presently opened and closed again, having given entrance to the quaint little figure of the first-floor visitor.

With a warm welcome Mabel hurried forward and took her hand, while Hilda, from her position at Lilly's feet, held out hers, and Lilly made an effort to do the same.

"My good little sister-mother!" exclaimed the new-comer, pressing Mabel's hand to her breast, "you look pleased to see me."

"I am! — we are all pleased!" Mabel replied, returning the pressure of the thin, wasted fingers, — more thin and wasted than when she had last held them, as was also the pale face that looked

mildly out from the old-fashioned bonnet. "We have thought of you and talked of you, and wished you to come to us again."

"And how is it with the child, sister-mother?" and she drew near the bed, and bent over little Lilly.

The question needed no word of answer; the wasted face and sunken eyes that met the look of the visitor told how it had fared with Lilly.

Gentle and tender as a mother's kiss was the one Lilly's "good angel" pressed on the brow of the little sufferer; and, when she raised her head again, her cheek was moist with tears.

"Mabel said you hadn't forgotten us," whispered Lilly, "and the ragman told Hilda you were sick."

"Yes, darling, I was sick," the visitor replied. "Sick almost from the time I first came to you," she added, turning to Mabel. "Mrs. Moppit has been with me. She always comes to me when I am not well. I might have left home any time to-day, but meant to put it off till to-morrow, when I'd feel stronger. But this evening I got tidings of the child being worse, — both the child and the sister-mother they told me were doing ill; so I

thought I must come, though it was late and cold. I seemed to feel I must be here *this night*, — that no put off till to-morrow would do, and so, — well, and so I came, and Mrs. Moppit came with me. She thought it best for me to stay; but, since I must come, she came along."

Hilda here gave a questioning glance to Mabel, then explained that they were without coal, and that they had thought of borrowing some from their neighbor below.

Their visitor had taken the chair by Lilly's pillow, presented by Mabel, and appeared to have subsided into a dreamy state, her eyes fixed on the face of the child, whose hand she held in her own. She didn't seem immediately to gather Hilda's meaning; but presently turned round, and, with a hasty glance at the two sisters, passed her hand several times over her brow.

"I'm wrong — so wrong," she said, with a touch of energy such as they had not yet seen in her; "I dream, and don't act. You mustn't think me unkind; it's the *one thought*, you know, always *here*," touching her forehead again, — "the failing babe and its mother. I know it all so well! It doesn't seem to give me time to do what I want —

what I've thought of. I came out to-night, because something seemed to say to me the child and its sister-mother were sorely wanting me; yet here I am, and I don't" —

She got up and walked quite briskly the length of the room, her hand on her brow.

"Go to her," she then said, stopping suddenly before Hilda, — "Go to Mrs. Moppit, and she will give you coal. Tell her I bid her let you have it; get as much as you want."

"I shall get but little," Hilda replied, with an embarrassed glance at Mabel, — "only enough to keep poor little Lilly from suffering this cold night. We're very poor — our last money will go for coal to-morrow; but Mrs. Moppit shall be paid back."

"Don't think about that," rejoined the little woman, rather quickly. "You must warm the room. Oh, yes, the poor child is cold; you're all cold, and that mustn't be. You're poor? — yes, to be sure! they told me that; yet I forgot! Something said to me, 'Go to the child and its sister-mother to-night,' — and I came."

She resumed the place she had left beside the bed, and again took the little wasted hand in her

own. Lilly opened her eyes, murmured something about "good angels," and closed them again.

Hilda looked at Mabel. A suspicion had been gaining ground with the former concerning their friendly visitor, and she read in the countenance of her sister confirmation of the thought. The little woman was certainly not in her right mind.

Hilda then took an old basket from a corner, and left the room with it to procure the proposed loan of coal from the first-floor lodger. She had not proceeded half way down the stairs, however, — Mabel meanwhile supplying the languishing fire from the little that remained of their coal, — when the house-door was heard to open and close violently, — so violently that Mabel heard it through the rattling she was making at the stove, and suddenly ceased her labors. As she turned to the door of the room, poor Hilda hurried in again, having hastened back at the first sound of the front-door opening. Throwing the basket from her into the corner, the terrified girl — for this coming of the house-agent (it could be no other than he) when her mind had been relieved of present thought of him, had put poor Hilda into

a paroxysm of alarm— caught Mabel by the hand, and with her hurried to the bedside.

“What is it?” questioned their visitor, looking up in half dreamy way. “Who is coming?”

“The wolf!” cried Hilda; and she threw herself across the feet of little Lilly.

This unexpected reply seemed considerably to arouse the visitor. Glancing from the feeble little figure on the bed to Mabel, she said:—

“Tell me what this means? Is it some one you’re afraid of?”

“Oh yes, yes!” Mabel replied; “it is our cruel landlord—David Brumbley. We haven’t the rent for him. He has threatened to turn us out”—

“He’ll take my bed—he’ll put me out in the cold!” shrieked poor little Lilly.

Meanwhile the shuffling tread of the house-agent could distinctly be heard ascending the stairs, with now and then a smothered oath, as he tripped or stumbled in the dark.

Having risen from her place by Lilly, the visitor whispered some soothing words to the terrified child, and then with a look of resolution and com-

posure, put out a hand reassuringly to each of the young girls.

“Don’t be alarmed, sister-mother,” she said — “don’t be alarmed, my poor girl,” turning to Hilda ; “I will stand between this man and you — between him and the darling babe. My head is not very clear for business,” she added, passing her hand again over her brow ; “but when I see it must be done, I can even drive this wolf from your door. He comes now. Stand back, both of you, and let *me* face him.”

As she spoke the door opened, and the ugly countenance and warped form of the house-agent appeared on the threshold.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BARBARA STRAND.



DAVID BRUMBLEY walked in, with a look on his face that said everything for the ugly feelings with which he had come; glared hurriedly around, then brought up with his eyes upon the little odd-looking woman who had so readily come forward to meet him.

Sudden and complete was the change which followed in the whole appearance of the man. The look of fierceness faded from his eye, the smile of malice from his lip, and abject and deprecatory submission expressed itself in the whole of the outer Brumbley. From the old, pinched hat, — which he hurriedly removed from his head, — to the termination of the turned-in nether limbs, every inch seemed to say he was really too humble an individual to be severely dealt with!

“What are you here for, David Brumbley?” were the first words addressed to him by the eccen-

tric visitor, very calmly, yet in a tone that must have assured the sisters that the speaker had the power to call him to an account, and was quite resolved to do it.

"Only doing my duty, Mrs. Strand," abjectly replied the man; "really a most distressing duty! I, for one" —

"And who has made it your duty to molest sick babies and suffering girls? On the contrary, have I not often cautioned you to deal with such leniently and mercifully? David Brumbley, you have deceived me! You are a hard, cruel man! You stand convicted at last. You came here to threaten poor young creatures with power you didn't possess, — with a course you had no law to sustain you in, and that, if you had, you well knew I would never sanction. You have threatened to turn this poor, crippled babe from her home, — to take the very bed she lay upon! you have agonized two poor, struggling girls with fear of seeing a dying sister molested! David Brumbley! did you dare do this, and not believe an all-ruling God must avenge on you the crime?"

"Rather hard language that, Mrs. Strand, for a man simply in performance of his duty!"

served Brumbley, rallying somewhat. "I tell you, if one in my position doesn't hold a tight rein sometimes, he's likely to come out short in his accounts at the end of the year."

"When was I so strict in your accounts as to force you to acts of oppression?" inquired Barbara; "when have I ceased to say to you, 'above all others, be gentle with poor young women and babes?' No, no, David Brumbley! you have made cruel threats, and you would have done the cruel things you threatened, thinking Barbara Strand was weak and forgetful, and would take no count of your misdeeds; that all power and right had centered in your own hands, and you might abuse it as your bad heart bade you. But there is an end to all this, now. God forgive me that I have let it go on so long! I have aroused myself a second time; you remember the first, and how you begged off with solemn promises never again to slight my injunctions to mercy?—and this arousing shall be to the good of many. It can be to the disappointment of one only."

"You wouldn't do it, Barbara Strand! you wouldn't"—

"Yes, I would. I would take from the hands of

a bad man power to do evil. David Brumbley, to-morrow you will make out your accounts, and the next day hand them over to me. From that time all business matters between us are at an end."

"And is this the reward of my long services?" whined the deposed house-agent. "I have been a faithful servant to you, Barbara Strand. I, for one, have looked more closely to my employer's interests than my own."

Barbara waved her hand for him to leave.

The whine suddenly changed to a growl.

"Because I wouldn't let beggarly sewing-girls and their brats live rent-free in your houses, you turn me off without a day's notice! There's no right or justice in all this. I, for one, say it's a cruelly unjust act."

Again Barbara waved her hand.

"Till Wednesday morning there is nothing further between us," she said. "You have breathed too long the atmosphere of innocence that is around these poor orphan children. Go!" and she pointed peremptorily to the door.

"Only another quirk of an addled brain," sneered Brumbley, in a loud *aside*, as he shuffled to the door. "The moon is at its full to-night; most likely daylight will dispel the fancy?"

Barbara vouchsafed no reply, but remained quite silent until the door had closed upon the unwelcome visitor; then, turning to Mabel, who, with her sisters, had witnessed with mingled feelings the singular interview, she said, —

“ Little sister-mother, you will see your *wolf* no more. Compose your babe with promise of this. Tell her that old Barbara Strand will try, so God wills it, to be the good angel to her and hers that she has so sweetly called her. And now,” she added, interrupting the thanks of both the sisters, “ you must tell me more about that story of wrong I heard from Mrs. Moppit. I heard it before I first came to you, and meant to speak of it then; for, if I mistake not, I know a way to aid you. I forgot it, — forgot it because my thoughts were all on the babe; but it’s not too late for it yet, — not too late to right the poor and the fatherless. To-night I shall remain with Mrs. Moppit, and early to-morrow you must come down and tell me the story.”

Mabel glanced at Hilda. She had herself no clue to this story Barbara spoke of, but Hilda might have. Of course she was right; Hilda had.

“ It was I spoke about it to Mrs. Moppit,”

said the latter, a sudden glow on her cheek. "I will come down to you to-morrow, Mrs. Strand; I will tell you everything."

"Then I will leave you," rejoined Barbara. "Too much depends on my head being clear to-morrow to allow me more time out of my bed. That man was partly right, though not in the way he meant; to-morrow may bring back my dreamy way, for it's not often I can shake it off as now. But there was a time when Barbara's head was good at business matters as many a man's; and even now, maybe, when she rouses herself, she can cope with a David Brumbley, or — a Hugh Kingsley. Little sister-mother," and she gently took Mabel's hand, "brighter days may be dawning for you. If God does not see fit to leave you your sweet babe, he may, at least, so ordain it that the little light shall flicker its last in a home of comfort and peace. Weep no more. It is a merciful One has you in his hand, and he has tried you and not found you wanting. What more he calls on you to bear, he will give you strength to bear."

She pressed the hand of Mabel and Hilda, bent for a moment dreamily over the pillow of little Lilly, then slipped quietly from the room.

When Hilda went down, next morning, to the first-floor, it was with her story — her long withheld mystery, — confided to the ear of Mabel. She could tell it to her sister now ; for it was now not only unexpectedly brought forward again, and in her presence, but under circumstances which seemed to promise the aid she had one time vainly looked for. Her faith was strong in Barbara Strand. The eccentricities of the little woman were plain to all, and the discomfited Brumbley had hinted at something more than eccentricities ; yet there was that about her which inspired confidence, and Hilda felt assured some good would result from the interview to which she was invited.

Upon entering the room of Mrs. Moppit, the young girl found Barbara rocking herself in the big-chair of her hostess, and undoubtedly under partial influence of that dreaminess which at most times obscured her powers of observation and action.

The appearing of Hilda, however, served considerably to arouse her, and it was not long before she was giving evidence of all the interest and energy she had exhibited the evening before.

The story Hilda related to her shall be given in

the young girl's own words, but without the remarks and questions with which Barbara occasionally interrupted it.

"The fourth of July last I was living with my cousin Kingsley. It was warm in the evening, and I sat in the summer-house. Cousin Hugh and cousin Algin walked in the garden, back and forth by the summer-house, and before I could think whether they cared to have me hear them talk, they had said things I knew they never meant me to hear. But those things were much to me and my sisters, and I couldn't do less than hear all I could.

"They were talking about *a paper*, — a paper that cousin Algin was wanting cousin Hugh to destroy ; but that he said he never *could* destroy. He said it had existed years without discovery, and was just as safe from discovery now as though it had been put in the flames, or torn into a thousand pieces, and that while it was still in existence he felt less reproach to himself. She mightn't quite understand this, he said, but he did. It was a matter of feeling, and he couldn't get over it. Little by little, as the talk went on, I came to understand all about this paper ; and that is what I must explain now.

"My great uncle, Godfrey Forman, brought up father and cousin Hugh, who were both his nephews. Father was the oldest and his favorite. He was away when uncle Godfrey died (uncle died suddenly, from the effect of an accident), and didn't know that, through some cause, uncle was much displeased with him. After uncle's death there was found a will leaving all his fortune to cousin Hugh. Cousin Hugh saw to the settlement of the estate, and when father came home, awhile after, he gave him some books that had been uncle's, and that he believed father would think much of. The books had been put by in a box, and among them father found a bundle of letters written by himself to his uncle when a boy at school. Father was so much pleased that uncle had preserved these letters, that he wouldn't himself destroy them, but put them by, as they were, in his desk. He mentioned to cousin Hugh how pleased he was to have them, and cousin said he had not himself come across them, but he was glad they had, by some chance, gotten into the box, and come to father's hand. Cousin Hugh would never have said that if he had known !

"Now, uncle Godfrey had written a paper to say

how, having discovered that misrepresentations had been made him about father, he returned to his first intention of dividing his property equally between his two nephews, according to an old will, the signers and witnesses of which were all living. I heard cousin Hugh myself say, that evening of the fourth, that this paper did away with the new will, though it wasn't gotten out in form, because of poor uncle's meeting with the accident so soon after, — I mean the accident that caused his death. He never was himself after the hurt, and that is the reason he didn't do anything to set the matter of the wills right.

“This very paper was tied up with the bundle of letters father had found; but as he never came across it, it is plain he only looked at the first letter or two of the package to make sure what they were. But after poor father's death, mother untied the package. Cousin Algin was by when she did it, and heard her say she would never part with them. She said this as she tied up the parcel again, and we all heard her say it. There was the paper among the letters; but she didn't notice it; maybe because she was crying so hard. Cousin Algin noticed it though; but, it seems, she didn't

think anything of it at the time. Afterward she mentioned it to cousin Hugh, and they got uneasy about it, because cousin Algin fancied, even at the distance across the table where she sat from mother, she recognized uncle Godfrey's hand-writing.

"Well, they never forgot that paper; and cousin Algin took care to get hold of it with the letters, at the time of dear mother's death. When I learned from their talk, how it had never been destroyed, I looked for it in cousin Hugh's secretary. But neither paper nor letters ~~were~~ there. Ever after that it was my wonder what cousin Hugh could have done with them, and I always seemed to feel as if I was to find them out and bring the papers to light. One day when things had got almost at their worst with us, I became sort of desperate, and went to cousin Algin herself, and told her all I knew."

Here Hilda followed with a relation of her visit to Mrs. Kingsley, her disappointment, and her after visit to her father's old friend, the lawyer.

"My hopes died out after that," she continued, "I felt that law and justice were in this matter so very far apart, that they could never come togeth-

er. If I have had a hope in all this time it has been that, at some future day, my cousins would feel remorseful for what they had done, and make willing restitution to us. But there is no thought of that now. God has brought terrible affliction upon them, in the loss of the dear little children they were so wrapped up in ; yet, far as I can learn, it has in no way softened their hearts. They know of our poverty and our suffering, yet they do nothing for us."

"The better way for all would be that this willing restitution shall be made," very gravely said Barbara, as Hilda came to a termination of her story ; "but with poor young creatures suffering as you are all suffering now, it must be left to no slow working of good in the hearts of those two to bring it about. Knowledge that our sin is discovered, is a strong spur to remorse, and with remorse comes the wish to return upon the past. I know something of your cousin Hugh Kingsley, and believe a plan I have thought of may bring all right without the delay or distress of a curse of law. and I must be seeing about it now," she added, briskly rising. "Too much depends on the doings of this morning to permit Barbara Strand to sit

idly in the warmth of this fire, though good Dorothy Moppit *has* piled on the coal to make it tempting."

She put on her quaint old bonnet, and wrapped her cloak about her; then stood hesitating, her eye upon Hilda.

"No, I wont!" she then said; "I'll not venture, as I would wish, to take a look before I go at the poor babe upstairs. It's a thing that sets me dreaming; and when I have acting to do, I must put dreaming far from me. Tell them," she added, "I go to do all I can for them, and that when I come back I will see them. Then the work will be put into other hands, and if a touch of her weakness comes over old Barbara, it can do no one hurt."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

LAW AND JUSTICE.



S Mr. Theodore Trowbridge sat in his office that morning, Barbara Strand presented herself before him. If a visit from the little woman was unlooked for on that particular day, the manner of her reception proved her no stranger to the lawyer. In fact, Mr. Trowbridge was the person to whom were intrusted all Barbara's business matters; and consequently, an acquaintance was tolerably well established on both sides.

But a little matter of surprise presented itself, soon after her coming, for all that,—a little matter of surprise to the gentleman; for, in a manner quite new in his experience of his client, that is, new for its liveliness and energy, Barbara made request for a private interview.

Mr. Trowbridge readily granted the request, and they having entered together the former's

sanctum sanctorum, a conference took place between them, the particulars of which will be known in due season. Before Barbara left, a note was written by the lawyer, and entrusted by him to his briskest clerk for immediate delivery.

"That will bring Kingsley to me within the hour," then very gravely observed Mr. Trowbridge; "and I will proceed in the business exactly as you have suggested, Mrs. Strand. Whatever the result may be, I will write you fully concerning it before the day closes."

In less than an hour after Barbara left the office, Mr. Kingsley entered it. The task Barbara's friend had undertaken was a peculiarly delicate one, and he entered upon it in a manner that showed him duly sensible of this fact, and also that it was one that must be accomplished with firmness and decision.

Not only had Mr. Kingsley been his friend and client for many years, but the late Mr. Godfrey Forman, the uncle alluded to by Hilda, had been so likewise. The will, which left the entire property of this gentleman to his younger nephew, had been drawn up and witnessed by Mr. Trowbridge, as was, also, the one of an-

terior date, which made an equal division of the uncle's fortune between his two young relatives.

In as concise a manner as possible, Mr. Trowbridge opened the business of his summons to his client by informing him of the discovery made, or supposed to be made, by Hilda Ross. Mr. Kingsley exhibited a great deal of agitation from the moment of the subject being touched upon.

"My wife said something to me about a visit of this deluded girl on the matter you mention," he said in reply; "but my mind has been in no condition to think of it, nor has Mrs. Kingsley's. I am an afflicted man, Mr. Trowbridge. I have left at home, ill, the last of my four cherished darlings,—my little girls, who were my pride and hope, and their mother's. I am in no condition for a business of this sort. I did not suppose it was for a matter to add to my discomfort you sent for me. It must wait another time."

"It cannot wait," calmly rejoined the lawyer. "If you have sorrow in your home, Kingsley, so have your young cousins in theirs. They have poverty, they have illness, they have loss. I have undertaken to look into this

matter for those orphaned children, and must do it."

"The whole thing is the vagary of a foolish girl," said Mr. Kingsley, quickly. "You would only waste your time upon it."

"It may be so, — only a vagary, as you say; but you owe it to yourself to prove it."

"Prove it to whom?" asked Mr. Kingsley, with an effort to rally. "Can one reason with, or prove to, a poor demented girl?"

"Prove it to *me*, Kingsley. In my possession I believe is the very package of letters referred to. You remember you entrusted to my keeping, early after the period of Mrs. Ross' death, a parcel sealed up, which you told me were simply old letters which you wished preserved. In your presence let this parcel be examined. It will speak for itself. If no such paper be there, the matter must drop, and I have done my duty; if, on the contrary, the paper spoken of be found among the letters, *you* will do yours."

Mr. Kingsley crossed the room with an agitated step.

"Give me ten minutes to speak to my

wife, Mr. Trowbridge!" he then said, pausing before the other.

Mr. Trowbridge gravely shook his head. "Take no counsel," he replied, "but from your own heart. Act as you would do if to-morrow, in place of bringing you every promise of life and health, were surely bringing you but a few hours in which to end your worldly accounts. In face of such a *to-morrow*, how would you act *to-day*?"

Mr. Kingsley looked away from his companion, his lips trembling, and his features ashy pale; then sinking on the sofa where he had before sat, he buried his head in his folded arms.

Mr. Trowbridge said not a word. He left the aroused conscience to work its own way.

Five or ten minutes thus passed, the heavy respirations of the suffering man being all the sound that broke the quiet of the room. Then raising his head, Mr. Kingsley looked firmly and regretfully in the eyes of his old friend.

"Mr. Trowbridge," he said, "if I had been brought to the determination I have now made through a voluntary motion of my own, I would be an easier-minded man at this minute

than I have been from the evil hour I was tempted to conceal the existence of that paper. God knows that I have suffered for the wrong. He knows, too, whether it was for *that* he has brought upon me the crushing grief I bear this day! Even as it is, forced by necessity to make reparation to these poor girls, I feel already relief of a dead weight here," striking his breast. "Bring out the letters, and we will look them over."

Mr. Trowbridge silently brought them to the table, where together they seated themselves.

"Let me have them," said Mr. Kingsley, taking up the still sealed package. "You need not fear to trust me now, Mr. Trowbridge. If all could again be as it was, I would bring forth the paper."

The seals were broken, and then appeared a bundle of time-stained letters, tied together with a tape. With trembling fingers Mr. Kingsley turned over some half dozen of the letters, and produced from among them a written paper, one half only of a sheet of letter-paper. He looked at it for a moment, then placed it in the hand of Mr. Trowbridge.

"I might have defied you," he said, as he did so, — "I might have denied the autography of that

paper, were it produced against me, and made trouble for the poor girls whose rights it proves ; but if I thought to do so, it was but for a moment, and that one moment I regret. I have long felt it would come to this, — have almost wished it. It is all right as it is. One thing I will say for myself," he added, "and you may believe it is the truth : if that paper had come into my hands at the time of my uncle's death, it would never have been concealed. But *possession* blinded me to the rights of others. I had owned *all* so long, I was too greedy to be content with half. Take the paper and the whole management of it into your own hands, Mr. Trowbridge. I make no reserve of interest on the twenty thousand, — all shall be exactly as a court would adjudge it." He paused for a moment, and then added, "I might any time have destroyed the paper ; but I *don't regret I did not*. I say it expecting you to believe me, Mr. Trowbridge."

"And I do," earnestly replied the latter.

"You are kind, sir, after all this !"

"How will you have it done?" inquired the other, after a silence upon the part of each ; "as a gift to your cousins ?"

"No !" emphatically replied Mr. Kingsley. "I would sink under that ! Tell the truth, far as may

be, — tell that a will has been discovered setting aside the former one, and sharing my uncle Godfrey's property. I have prospered in my business, as you know, and can well afford this ; but had it been that it must ruin me, would I have dared to complain? *I have prospered?* No! God has prospered me. Perhaps he has meant to smooth the way for me to make reparation. But I have been stubborn and blind ; I have tempted him ” —

His friend made no reply. He was tying up the bundle of letters, having carefully put aside the paper.

“ The person who injured the writer of those letters in the eyes of my uncle believed he was doing me a service,” thoughtfully observed Mr. Kingsley. “ How short-sighted we are ! He was planning for me the temptation and the sorrow of my life.” He hesitated, in evident embarrassment, then added, “ I owe it to my wife to say, that, though at one time satisfied to persuade herself, as I did, that my uncle's real wishes were expressed in his second will, she has latterly — since the visit of poor Hilda Ross, which affected her strangely — more than once suggested that we should, nearly as we could, undo what we had done. Had I listened to her, how much might have been spared me, spared us both ! ”

CHAPTER XL.

TARES SOWN, TARES REAPED.



T was a few weeks after this that, returning from a visit to the good Barbara Strand, Mabel met her friend, Mrs. Haggles.

"I'm so glad to see you!" exclaimed Mrs. Haggles. "I've heard all that's happened to you, and often thought of you.

So a new will was found giving you and your sisters half the Kingsley estate? Mrs. Kingsley herself told a friend of mine about it, and said it was really no matter of distress to her to part with those thousands, as you were all such good girls, and had gone through much trouble. Poor woman! she's had such a time in her family, — only one living out of her four little girls! She told this friend of mine that she holds this one child in fear and trembling, — yes, those were the words, 'in fear and trembling.' And how is your little sick sister? I heard, too, that

you had your other sister home with you, — the one from the New York school, that was taken by Mrs. Lemming. Is she going to stay with you altogether now ? ”

In reply to these two questions, Mabel said that little Lilly was no better, and that Minnie would remain with them at least until the return of Mrs. Lemming.

Mrs. Hagges still held her hand. She gave it another pressure, and with a sigh abruptly said, —

“ I suppose you’ve heard my daughter Lizie’s married ? ”

Mabel replied that she had not heard it ; adding some words of congratulation, though she somehow divined from the look and tone of her companion that the latter did not altogether regard the circumstance as one of congratulation.

Mrs. Hagges sighed again.

“ Yes, dearie,” she continued, “ our poor little Lizie’s married. It’s altogether a most uncomfortable thing, and it’s made me and her father miserable as can be. Mr. Thaddeus Ponsskiwhiskie, — I can run off his name easy enough now, but when he first came about, it was a regular poser to me, — Mr. Ponsskiwhiskie’s a foreigner from Russia, and

he made dear little Lizie's acquaintance at New York, and got her to engage herself to him while she was at school. You know things aint in the old-fashioned way now, but girls make plenty of gentleman acquaintances at boarding-schools. Well, well! far as I can see, the old-fashioned way was the best one. Soon after I first saw you, Mr. Ponskiwhiskie came to Chicago after Lizie. He's a splendid-looking fellow, — no one can deny that, — and he made us all believe he was a great somebody or other, a prince or a baron, I believe; and we thought, of course, it was all right, as he'd come from New York city, and the principal of the school let him visit Lizie there. He stuck to Lizie's elbow wherever she went, and made great show of his love for her; and so we gave our consent, and the wedding came off. A grand affair it was! Why, you might have seen all about it in the papers. They called it the 'great golden marriage in high life,' or something of the sort. But all the gold that got it up came from *our* side the house; for we've never seen the first yet from our Russian prince!

"Well, my dear, it's all ended in our finding out he's no prince or baron, but only a New York gambler. To think of our dear little Lizie being

married to such a character ! Mr. Hagges's just broken-hearted about it ; and so am I ; though it's some comfort to know all responsibility about Lizie was put off my shoulders when her father sent her, a little thing, to the New York school, where they bring up girls professionally. Well, the only hope we have is, that, as Mr. Ponsskiwhiskie was plainly dead-set on Mr. Hagges's money, when he finds, after a while, that he can't get any as his son-in-law, we'll be able to ' buy him off,' as Mr. Hagges calls it, and get poor little Lizie to ourselves again. Between you and me, I don't believe she'll be a bit sorry ; for any one can see she's not at all happy with him since the trick he played on us is found out ; and, besides that, we don't think over well of his habits and his treatment of her. Poor, dear little Lizie ! Well, well ! I never did like his having that ' whiskie ' in his name."

Mabel expressed her regret at hearing this sad fate of the pretty doll.

" Well, our troubles aint the only ones," remarked Mrs. Hagges, having given the third sigh. " Maybe you know all about Mrs. Graith's daughter ? "

Again Mabel replied in the negative.

“No? Why, Miss Belinda has run away with young Ralph Barrett. It was all through fault of a French governess, that Mrs. Graith thought the world of, but that’s turned out no better than she should be. She aided and abetted the whole thing, and ran off with the young couple herself, taking care to get a quarter’s salary in advance, just the evening before she left. But one of the worst things about the matter is that young Barrett forged a check on his father for a large amount, and got it cashed, and carried off the money with him. The whole party’s gone down south somewhere, where the French governess has a secesh lover, or husband, or something. Well, well, with our sons and our daughters we have a sad time to be sure! Mothers aint good enough to bring up their daughters, you see, so to boarding-school they must go; while, as the big fortunes made in oil puts into the heads of all the young people to be rich right off, they try for it, one way or another; and if the trying brings disgrace on them and all belonging to them, why, it’s no more than is to be looked for.”

CHAPTER XLI.

UNDER THE MOUNTAIN-ASH.



HE little light was flickering feebly, indeed ; but not in privation and want, but surrounded by every comfort that means could furnish the little sufferer. Again, in the still night, was the delicate ear of the child soothed by the low tick of the old watch, redeemed from the hands of the pawn-broker ; again was “ mother’s watch ! mother’s watch ! ” the music she heard in it.

With the cheerful spirit natural to her days of health, little Lilly appeared to have forgotten the trials and troubles of latter months, or only to remember them to find greater comfort in the blessings now around her.

“ It’s come only for a little while to *me*,” she whispered one day to Mabel ; “ but then, I’m so happy to know it’s put an end to all the trouble for you and dear Hilda and Minnie.”

With a tender glance into the tearful eyes turned wistfully upon her, Lilly presently added, —

“I’d like to say something more, Mabel dear, only I don’t think you like me to talk about it.”

“Say anything you wish, darling.”

And Mabel wound her arms lovingly about the frail, wasted form of the child, as though to make sure she held *now*, at least, the thing so dear to her.

“Well, Mabel, I was going to say, that, since you’ve got plenty of money, you’ll be able to put the pretty white stone you and Hilda used to talk about at mother’s and father’s grave; and, maybe, you’ll put a little one for me, too. Will you, maybe? Then there’ll be a beautiful mountain-ash for us all. I’ve been a good deal troubled all along about the mountain-ash, because I knew it must cost a good deal of money to put it there, and you didn’t have any at all; and I used to dream that some of the good angels we know, — maybe the good Barbara, — would come of themselves, knowing I wanted it so much, and put it just in the right place over the grass. But you’re crying, darling, and I won’t talk so any more.”

“The crying mustn’t stop you, dearest Lilly.

I want to know just what you wish ; and it shall be as you say."

" Well, Mabel, wont it be pleasant, when you and Hilda and Minnie see the tree there in the summer time and the fall, with its beautiful red berries, and know your little Lilly loved it above every other tree, and begged you to have it just there ? "

" It will, my precious."

" And instead of feeling sorrowful and unhappy, you'll be thinking all of you how Lilly was taken out of her pain to a kind Jesus who loves little children ; and how she's with dear father and mother again and the other good angels ? — gone before, Mabel ; only *gone before !* "

" We'll think of all that, dear Lilly. God will give us the consolation."

" Mabel ! " — after a pause, — " do you know ? — do you suspect ? " —

" What, my darling ? "

" Why I'm wanting to say all this to you *now ?* "

" Yes, dear Lilly, that we may know you are not troubled at thought of what must sometime

come ; that we may be comforted when — it does come.”

“ Yes, *that*, Mabel ; but something more, too : it’s because I think — I *feel* it will only be a little while now.”

A sob came near bursting from the loving Mabel, but was checked at the thought of the suffering it would cause the little one. But Hilda, who with Minnie had listened to all, from the foot of the bed where they stood, buried her face in her hands and gave way to the tears she could no longer restrain.

“ Poor, poor Hilda ! ”

The little voice was full of pity, and only caused the tears to flow faster.

“ O Lilly ! if I were but good, like the rest of you, I could bear it better ! ”

“ Dear Hilda, you are good.”

Hilda uncovered her face, and choked back her tears.

“ If I’m not all bad, Lilly dear,” she said, “ it’s because of my having you good ones by me. But I’m going to be better, Lilly, — I’m going to be more like Mabel. I want you to take a little minute and think of this, Lilly, — just a little minute. I’m praying always now for a good, strong faith like

Mabel ; so that when the time comes for me to go to you and mother, I may be *worthy*, — you understand, Lilly ? I mean those words of mother's, that Mabel has often told you, — to be 'worthy the home to which we all are going.' And, Lilly, I tell you this now for the same reason you've been telling so much to Mabel, — you know, Lilly ?”

“Yes, dear Hilda, because I shall go from you all so soon.”

And it was soon she went, — sooner perhaps than the little one herself thought ; for Lilly never wakened from the sleep into which she fell an hour or so after this talk with her sisters.

Two white stones mark the spot where sleep three of the household, — “gone before,” — three taken and three left ; and over them blooms the beautiful mountain-ash, with its glory of scarlet berries, reminding the three who remain of the “angel-child” who tarried with them here a while, making purer and better their hearts, then sped to the world of light, — from sorrow, — from pain.



